Mutinies - Dave Lamb

Solidarity's excellent pamphlet on mutinies in the British armed forces towards the end of World War I.

MUTINIES

by Dave Lamb

"Our experience accustoms us to seeing how at a word of command a mass of soldiers will enter into an organised fury of carnage and into the lottery of life and death, and how at another command they will again become peaceful. The same thing is required of a people that has wrested itself. Here the word of command is liberty, the enemy tyranny. . . But there is a great difference between the passivity of ordinary military obedience and the ardour of an insurrection: between obedience to the order of a general and the flame of enthusiasm which liberty pours into the veir of every creature. . These efforts are the enjoyment of liberty, and you wish it to be renounced, these occupations, this activity is for the public cause, this interest is the driving force, and you want the people to sink into inertia and boredom once more."

G.W.F. Hegel (1)

These words were written a hundred years before the 1914–1918 war, yet they capture the sentiments of the forgotten men and women of that period who decided to take a hand in their own destiny. Hegel drew attention to the timeless urge to self-determination and to the joy which accompanies a victory of mutineers or insurrectionists over tyrants, bureaucrats, manipulators, and sanguinary generals. In the following pages I have tried to uncover some of the conveniently forgotten moments of freedom which flowered in the shadow of total war.

Between 1917 and 1919 a series of mutinies took place amongst the world's most disciplined armies. The Russian, German, Italian and French forces as well as the British all 'suffered' major outbreaks. Yet many of these events have virtually been ignored by historians of both right and left-wing persuasions. Mutinies, like heath fires, burst out here and there and as such are inexplicable to those whose criterion for revolutionary activity is that it should be bound up with a clearly defined goal and with a strategy, usually embodied in a revolutionary leadership. Accordingly an outbreak of autonomous activity is seen by the leadership

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fetishists to be purposeless and mindless. Marx was speaking for future Fabians and Leninists when he said:

'A motley crew of mutineering soldiers who have murdered their officers, torn asunder the ties of discipline, and not succeeded in discovering a man on whom to bestow supreme command are certainly the body least likely to organise a serious and protracted resistance.'

(2) There is here a conception of social change as an orderly, disciplined activity. This conception is reflected in the tendency of both Leninists and Fabians to see themselves as the elite officer corps, imparting their will on the direction of social change. It is difficult to see from this standpoint how people might have aims and aspirations of their own, which are not always comprehensible to their self-appointed leaders.

One of the reasons why mutinies are largely ignored is because most historians tend to see the aims and objectives of the masses through the eyes of leaders or institutions that claim to represent popular interests. In this way the problems of the leaders become the problems of the class. Lenin's problems in 1917 become those of Russian workers. The problems facing the TUC become those of the British working class. In this perspective the mutinies in the Russian Army of

1917 are important insofar as they furthered Lenin's objectives. Mutinies in the British armies are deemed relatively insignificant because they were not subordinated to some external movement.

That ordinary men and women might have their own goals is conveniently ignored by historians whose vision is restricted to the ambitions and strategies of those in power or seeking to achieve it. This, to a certain extent, is understandable since the historian is very much at the mercy of his sources (press reports, autobiographies, and institutional minutes are usually the expression of the point of view of those who have made them). It is easy to deal with the memoirs of a Haig, a Petain or a Ludendorff. Conversely, it is 'uninteresting' and difficult to record the aspirations of those millions of Russians who collectively destroyed centuries of Tsardom because of their decision to return home, and their willingness to disobey and even kill their officers in the process.

We are living in an age where the aspirations of the collective are unable to find expression; the medium for such expression is limited to the individualistic categories of the bourgeois epoch. A sometimes all-too-willing victim of his medium, the historian tends to look at mass autonomous movements through the eyes of those who seek to direct the process, the spokespersons, the revolutionary generals, the political programmes and revolutionary textbooks. The historian looks to those who have staked their claim to impose their will upon human history. And in so doing those countless millions struggling for some control over their destiny are largely ignored. We can perceive why governments and military authorities have concealed information about mutinies. We can equally understand why those countless hacks who write history in order to justify the status quo do not demand the release of information. But why has this area been neglected by allegedly left-wing historians? Could it be that what happened ran counter to the presuppositions of both Fabians and Leninists that meaningful activity could only be envisaged in relation to some structure of authority? The mutinies in the United Kingdom did not throw up any such permanent structures and, for this reason, have been ignored by those who see social change as dominated by permanent institutions led by experts whose interests are antagonistic to autonomous mass activity.

A concentration on leadership strategies can blind one to some of the most powerful forces in history. For example, did the American government's decision to pull out of Vietnam arise

out of the wily schemes of Richard Nixon? Were the Americans out-manoeuvred at the negotiating table? Perhaps it was the brilliant strategy of the North Vietnamese generals?

Historians will grow fat on their published ponderings over these issues. But what about the fact that hundreds of thousands of GI's could no longer be relied upon? No one organised them. They left no permanent structures behind, yet their resistance had a profound effect on world history. It might be said that they were acting in the interests of 'world communism' but hardly one of them would accept this as an explicit motive. They just wanted to go home.

The following pages are an account of mutinies which occurred among UK and Commonwealth troops. There will be no attempt to impute any motives other than those put forward at the time by the participants themselves.

Perhaps the most significant factor in this sadly neglected chapter in working class history is the emergence of equalitarian tendencies, unstinting self-sacrifice and loyalty to one's comrades under conditions capable of bringing out the worst in men. A mutiny against arbitrary authority provokes situations where class loyalties are put to the severest test. If properly understood the mutinies within the armed forces during the First World War will stand as one of the great landmarks of working class history.

COULD BRITISH TROOPS MUTINY ?

The first question one should ask is why did the troops in World War I take so much? Why, year after year, did they allow themselves to be used as cannon fodder? In trying to understand the phenomenon of mass disobedience the central question is not why they mutinied but why they endured for so long the conditions which make mutiny the most natural of responses. In 1917 the Russian soldiers declared 'enough'. Shortly after, a series of mutinies in the French armies were only put down after hundreds of executions.

There are many today who regard the power of the armed forces as beyond challenge. They see military might as the ultimate weapon in the hands of the state. This view, however, does not take into account the fact that armies are made up of men, that men have ideas and needs of their own; that they have an urge to take decisions themselves, however suppressed that desire may be, and that under appropriate social and psychological conditions the armed forces can

themselves become a source of revolutionary activity giving expression to libertarian demands. If one is looking for the establishment of permanent structures most mutinies will be seen as failures. But behind the apparent failures is a more complex reality.

Such struggles reveal that the mighty are not invincible, and that their weapon of last resort may break in their hands.

Mutiny can be defined as the revolt of men under discipline of death. The decision to mutiny is not taken lightly. For this reason it is not usually the demands made by the mutineers that make the mutiny significant (the demands are often granted) but the decision to mutiny. A mutiny is, in certain respects, a manifestation of class conflict, if by 'class conflict' we mean the rejection of the hitherto accepted relationship between order-givers and order-takers.

Those involved in a mutiny may participate for a number of reasons. A man may become sickened by official barbarity, or by excessive punishment for trivialities. Others may rebel over bad food, low pay or overwork. Homesickness or questions of conscience may play important roles. The common factor behind a mutiny is not so much the resentment as the decision to defy orders. Mutinies are made by those who decide to mutiny, knowing that they

themselves will bear the brunt of what happens.

What makes a mutiny tick? Under what circumstances do men act in solidarity, in defiance of the powers-that-be? Those who mutiny come together for diverse reasons and hold very different ideas about the point and purpose of the mutiny.

In the British armed forces, during the first two decades of this century, all the material and psychological factors for mutiny were present and many incidents took place. One of the reasons they did not grow to full stature is the skill of 'our' ruling classes. Those in authority have known how and when to grant concessions, and had the resources to do so. The British ruling classes before World War I had over a hundred years of experience at being the supreme masters in industry. Throughout the nineteenth century they had been ruthless, clever and rich enough to repress, manipulate or buy off classes or groups that posed any real threat to the status quo. Bestowing respectability on a limited number of working class leaders and granting concessions that did not lead to any fundamental transfer of power.

One could argue that the British soldier's cultural background acted as a check that prevented him from taking revolutionary action. But during World War I the rationale behind military training was to drive out any qualms and restraints and replace them with simple 'blood lust'.

This is how Brigadier General Crozier described his battalion's training programme in 1915:

'I, for my part, do what I can to alter completely the outlook, bearing and mentality of over 1000 men... Blood lust is taught for the purpose of war, in bayonet fighting itself and by doping their minds with all propagandic poison. The German atrocities (many of which I doubt in secret), the employment of gas in action, the violation of French women, the

"official murder" of Nurse Cavell, all help to bring out the brute-like bestiality which is necessary for victory. The process of "seeing red" which has to be carefully cultured if the effect is to be lasting, is elaborately grafted into the make-up of even the meek and mild .. .

The Christian churches are the finest "blood lust" creators which we have, and of them we must make full use.' (3) The British soldier, Crozier concludes, 'is a kindly fellow ... it is necessary to corrode his mentality.' (4)

Following this kind of indoctrination men were ordered into attacks and were killed in their thousands. Bewildered survivors returned, only to find the guns of their officers trained on them, forcing them back to certain death. The ordinary soldier was literally caught between two fires. He faced two enemies - and it was not always clear which was the worse.

Gradually the split between officers and men was to widen. As the officers who went with the men were killed off, those officers employed to 'hunt back' the men became increasingly alienated from those they commanded. (5)

Towards the end of the war the situation worsened. The widening gap between officers and other ranks is reflected in the official figures relating to those condemned for acts of indiscipline, refusal to obey orders or mutiny:

'Shot for desertion : 266 soldiers, 2 officers

Shot for cowardice : 18 soldiers

Shot for disobedience : 5 soldiers

Shot for sleeping on post: 2 soldiers

Shot for quitting post: 7 soldiers

Shot for striking or violence : 6 soldiers

(Some 2,600 other death sentences were passed but the sentences were commuted to various terms of penal servitude). ' (6)

Tom Wintringham's figures also show a marked increase (from 1916 onwards) in the number of sentences handed out. In 1916 these amounted to 60, in 1917 to 221, in 1918 to 676. (7) These figures, of course, do not tell us much about those 'dealt with on the spot' but they reveal a substantial increase of acts of indiscipline. (8) The authorities relied heavily on the fear of the firing squad. According to Philip Knightley in the Sunday Times Supplement (April 30, 1972), 'About once a week during the war, in France, Belgium, East Africa, Gallipoli, Salonica, Egypt, Palestine or Serbia ... a notice was read out on parade that an unnamed British soldier had been shot for cowardice or desertion'.

With such morale-boosters the decision to mutiny was not taken lightly.

Few of those executed were mutineers in the proper sense of the word; many were victims of what later became known as 'shell-shock'. Real mutinies began to break out in the allied armies in 1917. A heavily guarded secret at the time, it is now widely known that the French Army was partly neutralised by mutinies in the summer of 1917. This led to a drastic revision of military strategy - with British troops having to bear the brunt of the offensive. Many of the facts were even concealed from the War Cabinet in England. In his biography of General Trenchard, Andrew Boyle gives us an inkling of the workings of the official mind:

'It was doubtful whether a dozen senior officers, including Robertson, were fully aware of the Commander in Chief's motive for concealing from Lloyd George and the War Cabinet the real reason for maintaining the offensive to the bitter end that autumn (1917). It is certain that few realised more vividly than Trenchard why Petain had insisted on absolute security. Only the British Army could buy time to stop the rot in the French forces.' (9) But the problem was wider. It was also about how to stop 'the rot' spreading to British troops.

ETAPLES: 1917

Etaples, about 15 miles south of Boulogne, was a notorious base camp for those on their way to the front. Under atrocious conditions both raw recruits from England and battle-weary veterans were subjected to intensive training in gas warfare, bayonet drill, and long sessions of marching at the double across the dunes. After two weeks at Etaples many of the wounded were only too glad to return to the front with unhealed wounds. Conditions in the hospital were punitive rather than therapeutic and there had been incidents at the hospital between military police and patients.

Matters came to a head one Sunday afternoon (September 9, 1917) after the arrest of a gunner in the New Zealand Artillery. A large crowd of angry men gathered and did not disperse even when told the gunner had been released. It was clear that the protest over the arrest was only the tip of an iceberg and the atmosphere was tense. The arrival of military police only made

matters worse and scuffles broke out. Suddenly the sound of shooting was heard. Private H.

Reeve, a military policeman, had fired into the crowd killing a corporal and wounding a French woman bystander. (11) News of the shooting spread quickly. By 7.30 pm over a thousand angry men were pursuing the military police who fled in the direction of the town.

The Camp Adjutant describes how the men 'swarmed into the town, raided the office of the Base Commandant, pulled him out of his chair and carried him on their shoulders through the town. ' (12)

The following morning measures were taken to prevent further outbreaks and police pickets were stationed on the bridges leading into the town. Nevertheless, by 4 pm men had broken through the pickets and were holding meetings in the town, followed by sporadic demonstrations around the camp. On Tuesday, fearing further outbreaks, the Base Commandant requested reinforcements. Meanwhile, the demonstrations gathered momentum.

On Wednesday, September 12, in spite of orders confining them to camp, over a thousand men broke out, marched through the town and then on to Paris Plage. Later that day reinforcements of 400 officers and men of the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) arrived, armed with wooden staves. A more sinister

presence was cavalry support from the 15th Hussars and a section of the Machine Gun Squadron. The threat worked: only 300 men broke camp and were arrested at Etaples. The incident was now over and the reinforcements were dispersed. (13)

If shooting had broken out who knows what the effect would have been on the rest of the British army in France, particularly at a time when the French army was itself in such trouble? Moreover, at Etaples, the authorities could not rely on New Zealand troops to shoot down Scottish demonstrators with whom they had close loyalties. And a cavalry attack on unarmed men might have provoked a strong reaction. In the event the authorities were able to manage with the HAC. (14)

Not all mutinies that year ended as peacefully. On September 5, only a few days before the outbreak at Etaples, two companies went on strike at Boulogne. The following day they tried to break out of camp and although unarmed they were shot down. Twenty three were killed and twenty four wounded. (15) Yet despite such harsh reprisals within four days Number 74

Labour Company also struck. The authorities responded on September 11 by killing four men, wounding fifteen, and inflicting prison sentences on twenty five more. (16) Only a month later a similar dispute took place in the First Army Area, where five men were killed and fourteen wounded. Many other strikes in the Labour Corps were similarly 'overcome', but casualty lists are not recorded. We know that in December 1917 a Guards detachment opened fire on strikers of No. 21 Labour Company at Fontinettes, near Calais, killing four and wounding nine. 'Despite such rebuffs', say Gill and Dallas, 'strikes amongst labour companies continued to occur'. (17)

The severity of the repression can be explained by the fact that these particular mutineers were Chinese or Egyptians whose treatment was determined by the colour of their skins. Not every mutiny was put down by a display of superior strength. This was due to one of the fundamental paradoxes of a rigidly disciplined organisation, in wartime, of which the authorities were well aware. Once men reach the point where death is familiar, fear of death has less effect. There were other restrictions on the decision to shoot: draconian methods could themselves provoke further trouble.

So whilst 'native' labour troops continued to be subdued by shooting, reforms

were instituted

to try to prevent further outbreaks at Etaples. The system of training was virtually abandoned.

Thousands came to believe that the Etaples mutiny 'changed the whole phase of routine and

"bull" from Base to Front Line'. (18)

There was a rumour that 'ringleaders of the Etaples mutiny were later shot'. (19) But we have no concrete evidence to corroborate this. Official policy was flexible. 'Men responsible for organising disaffection on a far larger scale the following winter' say Gill and Dallas, 'in both France and the Middle East, escaped without punishment at all, so threatening were the number and temper of the troops who backed them up. Equally, unfortunates who ran away from the trenches, if only for a day, were very often shot.' (20) Whatever steps the authorities took they did not stop the rising tide of mutinies which continued throughout 1918, reaching a peak in the winter of 1918-1919. Sometimes the anger of the mutineers broke into full-scale riots, as on the night of December 9-10, 1918 'when men of the Royal Artillery stationed at Le Havre Base burnt down several depots in a riot which, in its destructiveness, outweighed anything which Etaples base had seen.' (21) **ARRAS AND VAL DE LIEVRE**

Armed with the experience of the French mutinies the authorities took careful steps to avoid the spread of strife within the British Army. This partly explains why severe punishments were always dished out to isolated individuals whilst mass autonomous movements were often left unpunished, lest they lead to further trouble. (22) Yet in spite of the efforts of the authorities organised disobedience continued. In Arras, Canadian troops held out for two days against the officers and the Military Police. It was only the supply of drink from the wine cellars that prevented a further escalation of the mutiny.

(23)

At Val de Lievre there is evidence that the distribution of socialist literature may have influenced the nature of the protest. This mutiny of artisans and trade unionists enrolled in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps took place in the Val de Lievre workshops, near Calais. At many of these camps dissatisfaction over food, hours and pay were motivating factors.

Grievances were communicated through the Messing Committees but no action was taken.

Some twelve month before the Armistice matters came to a head at Val de Lievre in the form of a stay-in strike. An anonymous spokesman for the mutineers said:

'We were demanding that the working day should finish at 5 pm instead of 6 pm and we failed to secure this by negotiation. A committee of the works decided that all men should leave at 5 pm, ignoring the official hours. This failed as the response was only partial. A staff sergeant who had been most active in promoting this was moved and, we have reason to believe, victimised. However, the hours were shortened by half an hour. Nevertheless discontent continued, and Government war propaganda lecturers have good reason to remember the tows ing they received at Val de Lievre Camp - one of the effects of reading socialist publications which were smuggled into camp. ' (24) **PIRBRIGHT, SHOREHAM, FOLKESTONE AND DOVER**

The Val de Lievre strike was followed by a similar mutiny in Britain. In early 1918 there was a mass walkout by Guards Machine Gunners stationed at Pirbright, between Woking and Aldershot. The origins of this mutiny are obscure, yet for three days every private soldier refused duty. Instead they organised voluntary route marches along the lanes near the camp, in defiance of their officers, returning only for meals. The strike was eventually called off when a colonel of the Welsh Guards arrived and, giving an assurance that there would be no victimisation, asked for a spokesman from each of the five regiments involved. According to an eye-witness:

'Five old soldiers agreed to come to the front, though to my knowledge they were by no means ringleaders. They were taken off to London under close arrest, court-martialed and sentenced to two years each in a military prison. The breach of faith may have come about because the colonel was overruled by the GOC London District. But I think we were naive to expect the public school code of honour to be extended to mere rankers. The rest of the rebels

- they must have numbered a couple of hundred or so - were split up into their original regiments, and a detachment sent to its reserve battalion for a short time before being put on a draft for France again . . . Many of those men were killed in action during the Great German Breakthrough of March 1913, and in subsequent fighting'. (John Wood, recalling 'The Guardsman's Revolt', The

Guardian. March 30, 1968.)

Only two days after the Armistice, on November 13 1918. Shoreham was the scene of a mutiny. The men marched out of the camp after a major had pushed a man up to his thighs in mud. One of the mutineers (GP, from North Shields) reports:

'The next day the General came down...and formed us into three sides of a square, drove his motor car into the centre, read the Army Act out, and then invited any man to step out and go to work who liked; I myself was made to fall out on the right by myself. You can imagine my feelings, as being an old soldier of over twenty years service. Of course, I knew the consequences of my act. But I never saw such loyal men in my life. Not one man moved. I could hear the sergeants in the rear of the men telling them to stand by me, and it was well that thev did, or I should have got ten years or so. The following morning one thousand of us were demobbed, my name at the head of the list, and one thousand every week afterwards. '

(25) The policy of partial concessions is a recurring theme in British mutinies between 1918

and 1919. Wherever possible ringleaders would be arrested. If this proved inexpedient they would be demobbed. If the level of militancy led to a decision to demobilise the most militant would be the first to go, with the aim of strengthening the power of the authorities over those remaining. At the same time all publicity was suppressed, and each outbreak isolated.

The election campaign following the Armistice of November 1918 encouraged the growth of disobedience in the armed forces. In a desperate bid to win votes Lloyd George had made promises of immediate demobilisation. It matters little whether he intended to keep these as the military authorities had already decided to the contrary. But the promise itself had the effect of weakening military discipline. The war was over and, in the absence of external threats, the pressure to submit to authority was less. This was not fully appreciated by those in command. There was a feeling of militancy - even of revolution - in the air. People believed it was possible to build a more just society than the one which had just sent so many millions to their deaths. This attitude was not confined to Britain. From 1918 on, the fears of European war were replaced by fears of internal revolution, throughout Europe. In Britain these fears were not laid until

the combined efforts of the Government and the TUC had defeated the General Strike in 1926. There is no more promising material for revolution than

soldiers returning from wars, careless to danger and accustomed to risks and to taking collective action. Peace held no prospect for them. The 'homes fit for heroes' were not fit for pigs. That winter of 1918-1919 was the nearest Britain ever came to social revolution: the authorities lacked the support of the armed forces and the careerists in the TUC were faced with a similar situation in industry.

Dissatisfaction within the army in the winter of 1918-1919 had a number of sources, one of which was the 'pivotal' scheme. Only 'key men' - those with jobs to go to - could be demobilised. This meant that those who had recently joined up could be released before those with longer service. The scheme was worsened by bureaucratic bungling: men were sent home for Christmas and told that those who had found jobs need not return. But forms had to be filled in by their employers. The employers' contract had then to be endorsed by the Ministry of Labour. After this the man's unit would be asked if he could be spared.

Meanwhile, while 'procedure' took its course, the men had to return via Folkestone to Calais.

Some were demobbed on arrival, only to discover that there was no transport back to England. To make matters worse, there were no facilities for food and refreshment on the return journey.

Then there was the very real threat of being sent to fight against the Bolsheviks in Russia.

Although the Government were insisting that only volunteers were being sent to Russia there was widespread knowledge that many unwilling conscripts had been packed off.

During the few weeks following the Shoreham incident there was a flood of mutinies. Those at Folkestone and Dover were major disturbances. The mutinies broke out too soon after the Armistice for delay in demobilisation to be considered the sole cause. Antagonism towards officers, hatred of arbitrary discipline, and a revolt against bad conditions and uncertainty about the prospect of being sent to Russia all combined with the delay, confusion and uncertainty about demobilisation, to provide suitable ingredients. In Folkestone, on January

1919, the news that men were to be sent back to France kindled the spark of mutiny. The Daily Herald reported in somewhat euphoric terms:

'On their own signal - three taps of a drum - two thousand men, unarmed and in perfect order, demonstrated the fact that they were fed up - absolutely fed up. Their plan of action had been agreed upon the night before: no military boat should be allowed to leave Folkestone for France that day or any day until they were guaranteed their freedom. It was sheer, flat, brazen, open and successful mutiny. Pickets were posted at the harbour. Only Canadian and Australian soldiers were to be allowed to sail - if they wanted to. As a matter of no very surprising fact they did not want to. One officer tried to interfere. He leapt across the gangway and got a rough-house. 'I am a relative of Sir Douglas Haig' one of the officers pleaded.

'We are all King's messengers' said another party. But nothing of that kind availed them.

Meanwhile troop trains were arriving in Folkestone with more men returning from leave and on their way to France. They were met with pickets... in a mass they joined the demonstrators.

On Saturday an armed guard of Fusilliers was posted at the quays by the Army authorities.

They carried fixed bayonets and ball cartridges. The pickets approached. One rifle made a show of going up: the foremost picket seized it, and forthwith the rest of the guard fell back.

The mutineers visited the station in a body, after having posted their own harbour guards, and tore down a large label marked 'For Officers Only'...

On Saturday a great procession of soldiers, swelled now to about 10,000, marched through the town. Everywhere the townspeople showed their sympathy. At midday a mass meeting decided to form a soldiers union. They appointed their officials and chose their spokesmen.'

(26) Sir William Robertson, from the War Office, came down from London and conceded the men's demands. Everyone was to be given seven days leave. The

men were allowed to elect one hundred and forty demobilisation committees, from the rank and file. Complete indemnity was promised. The Herald said:

'Everywhere the feeling is the same, the war is over, we won't have to fight in Russia, and we mean to go home.' (27) There were fears that soldiers would be sent to fight in Russia but the message came over loud and clear: the vast majority were not prepared to be used. It is thanks to the courage of those who put their own needs before loyalty to the flag that a much larger contingent of British troops was not sent to Russia.

Another 4,000 troops demonstrated at Dover, in support of the Folkestone mutiny. They held a mass meeting in the harbour station and selected a deputation to meet the authorities. They then marched up to the Town Hall behind their deputies and formed lines on either side of the road, overflowing into the side streets. The mayor had to admit them into the Town Hall, where a piano was provided for their entertainment. Nearby a cinema was opened for the soldiers to enjoy a free film show.

The implications of these mutinies were very serious. To prevent a spread of unrest it was resolved that Horatio Bottomley, well known demagogue and MP and editor of the magazine John Bull, be sent to intervene as the 'soldier's friend'. (28) Leave was extended. A team of Ministry of Labour officials backed by an army of clerks arrived to speed up the checking of labour contracts so that those with jobs could be quickly released.

Immediately after the victory at Folkestone-Dover there were other outbreaks. The 'iron discipline' of the British Army was cracking under the strain. One of the more spectacular events took place on Monday January 6 1919, when over 1500 members of the Army Service Corps at Osterley (Isleworth) seized lorries and drove them into Whitehall. It was widely believed that this corps would be the last to be demobilised. The men had other intentions.

Within four days they were all demobilised. There were further outbreaks at Shoreham where seven thousand walked out, marching into Brighton. They were joined by a detachment of Royal Marine Engineers from Southwick. There were no reprisals and the men's grievances were dealt with immediately. That same day (January 6) there were several other incidents including a walk out at the Shortlands RASC depot where five hundred walked out, and marched to the central hall at Bromley. There were further demonstrations in London, when four

hundred men bound for South Russia refused to board a train - a surprising incident if all soldiers destined for Russia were really volunteers.

Later that week mutinies broke out at Bristol, Fairlop, Grove Park, Kempton Park, Park Royal, Sydenham and Aldershot.

THE WAR CABINET

There was panic at the War Office. The War Cabinet was deeply divided. On February 6, 1919 Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote in his diary:

'The whole of the demobilisation has been completely boxed up by Lloyd George, who in his anxiety to get votes at the General Election, kept adding every sort of authority to help. .. If Lloyd George doesn't announce to the country that the war is not over, the whole army will be turned into rabble.' (29) The next day, following talks at No 10 Downing Street, he wrote:

'I told Lloyd George to come out into the open and back the War Office.. .to crush the poisonous parts of the press. . .to say that the war is not over. ..To prepare the public mind for armies of occupation in India, Gibraltar, Malta, France, etc. .. This frightened Lloyd George and he agreed.' (30) On January 8 delegates from the Folkestone and Dover mutinies arrived in London, with delegates from other camps. This was the first overt sign of the growth of rank and file links,, No matter what the War Office intended the Army was going home.

There was nothing the Government could do but concede their demands. Field Marshall Wilson was furious. He recorded his displeasure in his diary:

'the whole trouble is due to Lloyd George and his cursed campaign for vote catching. Now he is forced up against something ugly as I told him he would be. At a meeting of the military members this afternoon we agreed that the AG should draw up a paper showing how constant civilian interference has wrecked our carefully worked scheme for demobilisation and explaining clearly that unless we soldiers were allowed to run our own show, we would have a disaster.' (31) The War Cabinet had adopted a scheme to retain a large percentage of the troops in some form of compulsory service. Wilson and Churchill supported sending troops to Russia, to 'knock out' Bolshevism. When Lloyd George left for the first Paris peace talks they co-operated to devise a compulsory service scheme. The plan aimed at having a million men in khaki, ready to put forces on the Rhine, to send men to Russia, to provide other armies of occupation and to cope with the situation in Britain. From the point of view of the fanatics in the

War Office the manpower demands for Britain's post-war policy (repression in Ireland, intervention in Russia, occupation of the Rhineland, and curbing of industrial unrest at home) were incompatible with large-scale demobilisation. Wilson and Churchill agreed that once they had piloted the scheme through the War Cabinet they should go together and confront Lloyd George with a fait accompli. They could then put the scheme into operation without further delay. Lloyd George, more aware of the realities, suspected that the scheme would not be accepted by troops already in open defiance. Churchill was therefore prevented from putting his plans to the War Cabinet.

Undaunted, Wilson and Churchill held an unofficial Cabinet meeting. Says Wilson:

'An unofficial Cabinet meeting took place in the form of certain 'conversations'. The case was put strongly by Churchill, that discipline was disappearing fast in the Army and Haig added that if things continued there would be no army left in France.' (32) Reluctant assent was given to their proposals. No secretary was present and no minutes taken. Following the meeting Churchill and Wilson crossed the Channel and pressured Lloyd George into an equally unwilling agreement. Even members of the Government expressed reservations at this blatant breach of faith. 'Bonar Law', says Wilson, 'is terrified of the scheme coming out, because of his election pledges.' The next stage was comparatively easy: the support of the press was needed for the re introduction of compulsory service. Wilson had no doubt that

they would comply and he wrote confidently in his diary:

'We will get all the press to bring out their puffs on Wednesday, and we will follow up with an Army Order on Thursday. Then the great adventure of compulsing (sic) a million men in the name of peace will have begun. There is not a moment to lose. All power within the Army is slipping away. We shall get one million men, who will be compelled to serve for months. Of course if these men refuse to serve we are done, but I have no fear. Winston and I can get full support from the press.'(33) Support from the press was crucial if a scheme which negated election pledges made only a few weeks earlier was to be implemented. As expected, the meeting with the press went off smoothly. Churchill and Wilson told them of 'their responsibility to the nation.' The hacks eagerly complied. According to Wilson 'the press behaved loyally and understood that the Army was in a state of flux and that the men were disposed

to take their opinions from what they read in the newspapers.' (34) But events were slipping out of the hands of megalomaniacs in the War Office. Unrest was sweeping the country. The common soldier was beginning to write history with his feet.

Whatever the War Office had in mind the troops were determined to make their own decisions. A military adventure in Russia was low on their list of priorities.

By January 8 1919, some 300,000 men had been demobilised. The release of the 'pivotal' men alone was proceeding at the rate of 4, 000 a day. Disturbances were still taking place throughout the country. On January 8, over 4,000 RASC men marched from Park Royal to Whitehall, where a reluctant Sir William Robertson conceded their demands for an immediate demobilisation, and promised there would be no victimisation. There was a further demonstration by 600 men of the Flying Service at Westerham Hill aerodrome, Kent. Several hundred men of the RAF School of Imperial Gunnery at Hythe marched to the Hotel Imperial and protested. Several hundred RAF men at Felixstowe marched on the Harwich defence.

100 men belonging to the Highland Light Infantry marched to the headquarters of the Scottish Command in Edinburgh. A large contingent of men from the Queen's, the Gloucester's and Wiltshire's in Maidstone, held a protest meeting in the High Street before marching on the Town Hall. (35) The first significant concession was the abolition of the contract system.

In a. desperate attempt to keep control Lloyd George made an appeal for restraint on January 9 1919. This was followed up by an Army Council notice to all units stating that:

'Officers and soldiers who embarked on and after January 12 for leave in the United Kingdom are only permitted to proceed on leave to the United Kingdom on the distinct understanding that they are to return to their units on the expiration of their leave, and that they will not be demobilised, under any pretext whatsoever, while on leave.' (36) The day this notice was published a large number of RAMC men in Blackpool refused to go on parade until all restrictions on their Corps were lifted. By now the number of 'pivotal' men released daily had reached 6,000 and a further 70,000 applications had been received. Meanwhile 125,000

miners had secured demobilisation and it was estimated that no less than 140,000 men per week were being discharged in the United Kingdom alone. The military authorities hoped to regain some control over the demobilised troops since they believed that a clash between the Government and organised labour was inevitable. There was therefore considerable embarrassment when the Daily Herald published a circular that had been sent to discharged members of the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC), which stated:

'The CO hopes that all those who have served in the HAC and are physically fit and able to rejoin in the event of any national emergency should communicate their address from time to time to the OCHAC depot... Those who are fully competent as either motor mechanics, mechanical railway, electrical engineers, dispatch riders, telegraphonists, signallers, etc. , are particularly requested to notify on the back thereof these or any other special qualifications which they may possess.' (37) The Government were pinning hopes on their ability to defeat the unions in the event of a confrontation. There was plenty of evidence before the trade union 'leaders' that in the event of a showdown the Army would not stand by the Government. However, the labour bureaucrats did everything they could to avoid a confrontation.

SOUTHAMPTON: 1919

A reminder of the strength of ordinary soldiers came from Southampton, in the middle of January, when 20,000 soldiers went on strike and took over the docks. Robertson, Commander in Chief of the Home Forces, sent General Trenchard to restore military authority. Trenchard had witnessed several mutinies in the French Army and was quite prepared to employ the most ruthless measures. Nevertheless he underestimated the men as he approached the dockgate and attempted to address a reluctant audience. A chorus of boos and catcalls accompanied his remarks. The meeting came to an undignified end when a group of men took hold of him and gave him a going over before ejecting him. Said Trenchard:

'It was most unpleasant.. . It was the only time in my life I'd been really hustled. They said they did not want to listen to me. They told me to get out and stay out.' (38) Smarting from his minor injuries and major wounds to his pride, Trenchard acted with the vengeful cunning which had preserved his military caste for generations. Indifferent to the grievances of the soldiers - many of whom had seen active service - he saw only a mutinous rabble to be put down by force.

Fully aware that the mutineers were not armed he phoned a request to the garrison commander at Portsmouth for 250 armed men plus an escort of Military Police. In spite of fierce objections from Southern Command, Trenchard made it perfectly clear that if necessary he would initiate a blood-bath.

The following morning Trenchard returned to the quayside and waited for the troop train from Portsmouth. Only when the unarmed mutineers had been surrounded by armed troops with their safety bolts in firing position did Trenchard make a second attempt to address the troops. And even then he was told to 'drop dead' by a sergeant, who was promptly arrested.

Following this incident the mutiny collapsed. 170 soldiers were personally selected as ringleaders by Trenchard, fifty three of whom were confined in a nearby troopship.

The docks were now quiet but a few score soldiers had barricaded themselves in their billets.

Hose pipes were commandeered and after half an hour Trenchard's riot squad had captured about 100 soaked and shivering men who were then forced to stand in the January frost outside Trenchard's office until the latter had satisfied his desire for vengeance.

A few weeks later, in early February, Trenchard was called in by Churchill, then Minister for War and Air, and was congratulated on his 'masterly handling of the Southampton riots' and appointed Chief of the Air Staff. (Duel of Eagles by Peter Townsend, Weidenfeld &: Nicolson, 1970, pp 47-8)

Unrest amongst the troops merged with unrest in industry. By February 1919 large numbers

of soldiers were refusing to return to the Continent. Civil disturbances in mining areas, which under normal circumstances would have been quelled by a show of force, presented grave problems to the authorities, since it was not clear whether the troops could be relied upon.

Eventually the Army Council decided that there was a Guards division that could be trusted and issued instructions for them to be brought back from the Continent. The Guards were used on a number of occasions, for example to disarm the Durham Light Infantry at Colchester, when they refused to embark

for Russia.

How near was Britain to a full scale revolution during these weeks? This must remain a matter for speculation. The Army was in disarray: soldiers and sailors councils and demobilisation clubs were being formed. Delegates from various camps were beginning to combine their efforts and resources. The number of strikes in Liverpool and Glasgow were increasing. There were riots in Glasgow and troops sent to occupy the streets were beginning to fraternise with the strikers and demonstrators. There were riots in Belfast and a national railway strike was imminent. From August 1918 until mid-1919 even the police force was affected by militant strike action.

RAF BIGGIN HILL: JANUARY 1919

This dispute was in many ways typical of the smaller struggles of this period. The 500 RAF

men of the Wireless Experimental Establishment at the South Camp of the famous 'Battle of Britain' airfield at Biggin Hill had been living in absolutely appalling conditions. Most of them slept in tents, the camp was a sea of mud and all the duck-boards and other stealable fuel had been burnt to obtain warmth in the freezing weather. The dining hall was a canvas hangar with its roof in shreds. The men had to eat in a morass of three inches of mud. Food was prepared in a cookhouse which was an open, rusty shed. Matters were made worse by the officious attitude of the authorities.

One evening in January, after a particularly foul meal, the men held a meeting. They had already complained many times to the authorities, without result. The meeting decided overwhelmingly in favour of strike action. The 'Red Flag' was sung and there were calls for a more active and radical policy, including a call for a march down Piccadilly smashing all the windows en route. These proposals were defeated.

The next morning no one turned out for duty. When the orderly officer tried to discover what was happening he was turned away from the dining hall by a sergeant and two men who refused to recognise his authority. The men removed magnetos from all vehicles in the camp, including those belonging to civilian contractors. Support came from the men of 141

Squadron of the RAF stationed in the neighbouring North Camp, who refused to

intervene on the side of the authorities. The strike committee was in complete control.

A deputation was sent to the CO, Colonel Blanchy (the new RAF ranks had not been fully introduced) and presented the following demands:

1. No man to be victimised.

2. Unless we receive a satisfactory answer from the Commandant we will put our case before Lord Weir, i.e. our deputation will proceed to his quarters.

(a) The men state that when they go "sick" the Medical Officer says that their complaints are due to the disgraceful conditions of the camp food and sanitary arrangements.

(b) Names of the men who can bear witness to the above statement can be supplied if necessary.

(c) We demand that Major --- shall be dismissed from this unit.

(d) Leave to be carried on in the normal way.

(e) The men demand that they leave the camp until it is put into a habitable condition by the civilian employees.

(f) Temporary release of those men who have jobs waiting and those who want to get jobs pending discharge. While the men are at home demobilisations must continue, and the men be advised by letter or telegram.

(g) Abolition of work on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

(h) Restrictions placed on Y.M.C.A. to be removed, prices in canteen to be lowered and a full explanation given as to what happens to P.R.I, funds.

(i) Efficient transport to be provided for officers, NCOs and men.

3. Grievances.

Sanitary:

(a) Wash-house - only 5 basins for 500 men.

(b) Wet feet - no gum boots issued.

(c) Dirty and leaking huts.

(d) NO BATHS.

(e) Inefficient latrines.

Food:

(a) Shortage.

(b) Badly cooked.

(c) Dirty cook-house staff.

(d) Dining Hall in a disgraceful condition.

(e) Fully trained cooks should be substituted for present inefficient youths.

THESE DEMANDS TO BE CONCEDED BY NOON TODAY.

Blanchy offered to accompany the delegation to the Area HQ at Covent Garden to support their case! The men agreed, and the magnetos were replaced in a sufficient number of vehicles to transport the delegation. Meanwhile the rest of the camp remained on strike. The Area second in command was shown around the camp by the strike committee, and the outcome was that the whole camp was immediately sent on leave for ten days, during which time conditions were drastically improved and the other demands largely conceded. When the strike ended there were no victimisations. This solid, but limited, struggle had met with complete success.

(source: RAF BIGGIN HILL, by Graham Wallace, Putman, 1957)

CALAIS: 1919

Unrest within the Army in France continued. A court martial at Etaples on September 22, 1918 sentenced five youths aged seventeen to nineteen to ten years imprisonment for acts of indiscipline. (40) This led to further agitation for their release. There was a growing campaign against the censorship of news

from home and soldiers at Calais elected delegates who also acted as distributors for the then prohibited Daily Herald. There were also demands for instant dismantling of the Val de Lievre workshops.

The stability of the Army on the Continent was affected by events back home. In France, in the war zone, official brutalities were rife. One example was at the prison at Les Attaques.

where men were detained for trivial offences such as overstaying their leave by a few hours.

Prisoners were only supplied with one blanket, during one of the severest winter for decades.

They were flogged and manacled for merely talking to each other.

At the end of January 1919, the men of the Army Ordnance and Mechanical Transport sections at the Val de Lievre camp called a mass meeting which decided to mutiny.

Conditions in the camp were bad, and reports of several incidents had already found their way into the newspapers.

The Calais mutiny began after agitation for demobilisation. It coincided with the arrest of Private John Pantling, of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, while delivering what the authorities described as a 'seditious speech to an assembly of soldiers.'

On pay night the men at Val de Lievre smashed open the jail and let Pantling out. The authorities tried to recapture him. When this failed, fresh military police were brought in.

They arrested the sergeant of the guard for failing to prevent the prisoner's 'escape'. Anger was now rising. The Commanding Officer - by now a very frightened man - released the sergeant, and called off the attempt to recapture Pantling. He also agreed to a meeting with the men to discuss their grievances. The next day many concessions were made, including shorter hours.

While this was taking place there was a distinct hardening of the attitude of the officers. The soldiers spent the weekend organising the other camps into Soldiers

Councils. On Sunday the officers struck back and rearrested Pantling. The news spread quickly. On Monday the newly organised Soldiers Councils called a strike. Not a single man turned up for reveille. The sentries were replaced by pickets. That same morning, at another camp in nearby Vendreux,

over 2,000 men came out in sympathy. Later that morning they marched to the Calais camp as a gesture of solidarity. After a mass meeting both camps marched behind brass bands towards the headquarters, where Brigadier Rawlinson was stationed. By now the mutineers totalled 4,000. The headquarters were quickly surrounded and a deputation entered. They demanded the release of Private Pantling. The authorities capitulated and promised that he would be back in his camp within twenty-four hours.

On Tuesday morning he was returned. But by now some 20, 000 men had joined the mutiny and the strike was spreading French workers were cooperating and a total embargo was placed upon the movement of British military traffic by rail. In fact the rail stoppage was a significant factor in the escalation of the struggle. 5,000 infantrymen due to return home, finding themselves delayed, struck in support of their own demand for immediate demobilisation. (41)

In an attempt to intimidate the mutineers General Byng and fresh troops were sent for.

Unfortunately Byng made the mistake of arriving before his men. His car was immediately commandeered by the mutineers and replaced by a modest Ford. Byng's troops were delayed for a further two days by Lhe blacking of British transport. When they arrived machine guns were placed at strategic points, such as food stores and munition dumps. Byng's troops, in the words of a participant, were 'bits of boys who were sent out just as the war ended. ' (42) Fresh from the growing unrest at home. they were even more reluctant to be in khaki than the Calais mutineers themselves. They started fraternising with them and before longhad joined the mutineers. The strike continued.

Some barrack room lawyer pointed out that Pantling could be rearrested at any time. It was decided that it would be to his advantage to be court-martialled whilst the soldiers were still in control. His acquittal would then be binding and he would be safe from further arrest.

Reluctantly, the officers had to agree.

The strike was now total. It was led and coordinated by the strike committee, which now took the title of 'The Calais Soldiers' and Sailors' Association.' Their method of organising was strictly democratic. Each hut or group of huts elected a delegate to the Camp Committee.

These committees then sent delegates to the Central Area Committee. By-passing the officers, these committees issued daily orders from the occupied Headquarters.

The quality and quantity of the food increased. The food surplus served to confirm the rumour that officers had secretly been selling food to French businessmen. S.C.A. Cannel, who was working as a clerk at the Ordnance Depot testified how:

'our food was being "flogged" to French people. In fact, I saw with my own eyes, clothes baskets full of bully, cheese and bacon going out of the camps at night. ' (43) Eventually a conference was arranged, at which major concessions were won. But the mutiny was drawing to a close. On the evening of the conference, whilst most of the soldiers were attending a local cinema, a surprise vote was taken. The result was acceptance of an officer's ultimatum to return under orders. These men then had to face the wrath of their comrades, who returned to discover that the mutiny had virtually collapsed.

During the mutiny contacts had been made with French workers, and with allied forces on the Rhine. Troops at Dunkirk were also ready to come out, and there was little doubt that they

would have found support amongst workers and troops back home. Had the movement continued it could clearly have developed a revolutionary character. A further significant sign that the army was crumbling was when women of the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary stayed away from work, in solidarity with the Calais strike. (44) Meanwhile, in Scotland, the Clyde strike had also collapsed. This played a part in lowering the morale of the Calais mutineers, who drew back from a course of action leading to revolution.

This incident had shaken the authorities to the core. British troops had shown they were capable of highly sophisticated forms of struggle, forging important links with other sectors of the army and with the civilian population. Although the strike was over, the authorities never felt strong enough to victimise the

strike committees or to reimpose the old type of military discipline. Soldiers were free to return to camp whenever they felt like it, and to enter cafes and the like during 'prohibited' hours, without fear of disciplinary action. The food was improved. New huts were erected. Weekend work was abolished. The Calais Area Soldiers' and Sailors' Association continued to meet and applied for representation on the newly formed Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union.

The mutiny had ended on January 30 1919. Within three months demobilisation began in earnest - only just in time to avert another wave of mutiny. The lesson that the military machine could be beaten had been learnt. (45) Churchill commented at the time that 'if these armies had formed a "united resolve", if they had been seduced from the standards of duty and patriotism, there was no power which could have attempted to withstand them. ' (46)

WHITEHALL (FEBRUARY 1919) AND THE WAR OFFICE CIRCULAR

This fear of uniting the troops prevented the War Office from giving full rein to Neanderthal-types like Trenchard. An incident occurred however which could have led to severe loss of life with untold consequences. It happened when three thousand demonstrating troops marched on Whitehall in February 1919. On February 8 troops returning to France after a period of leave refused to board for Calais. Orders were given for the railway station to be surrounded by a detachment of Guards. Sir Henry Wilson expressed the fear that there were no troops that could be relied upon to deal with the trouble.

A few hours later the three thousand mutineers marched into Whitehall. From his window Churchill could see the men, who by now had occupied Horse Guards Parade. He was informed by General Fielding that a reserve battalion of Grenadiers and two troops of the Household Cavalry were available. Churchill then asked whether they could be relied upon to obey orders. After an affirmative answer he ordered the General to have his men surround the demonstrators and take them prisoner. The Guards encircled the demonstrators, machine guns trained on them. They then advanced, bayonets at the ready. If the mutineers had not surrendered there could have been a bloodbath. This was one time when Churchill was not eager to be seen with his troops. Later the mighty warrior confessed: 'I remained in my room, a prey to anxiety.'(47)

Meanwhile the rot in the army in England continued, unchecked. At Battersea, troops of the Army Service Corps went on strike. They were joined by Service

Corps men in Camberwell and Kempton Park, the latter demanding civilian rates of pay for mending lorries intended for

sale.

One question dominated the Government: 'Could the troops be relied on, in the event of revolution or serious civil disturbance in England?' The Guards Division, as we have mentioned, was hastily recalled from Germany. But uncertainty about the reliability of the Army persisted, as reports flooded in.

Towards the end of January 1919 a most revealing episode took place. Concerned at the spread of the spirit of disobedience among civilians and about the constant talk of 'trade unionism' in the army, and alarmed at the prospect of a miners' strike which might have rallied the support of the Triple Alliance (of railwaymen, miners and transport workers) the War Office issued a circular, officially described as 'secret' to the Commanding Officers of all Army units. Several weeks later the document was 'leaked' to the Daily Herald ... who published it. A heated discussion of some of the issues involved took place in the Committee debate on the Army Estimates, on May 29, 1919.

The Circular requested of the Army officers that they provide weekly reports 'to reach this office without fail not later than first post each Thursday morning' on a number of important matters, including the following:

'Will troops in various areas respond to orders for assistance to preserve the public peace?'

'Will they assist in strike-breaking?'

'Will they parade for draft to overseas, especially to Russia?' Station Commanders were also asked to report weekly on:

'Whether there is any growth of trade unionism among the units under your command?'

'The effect outside trade unions have on them'

'Whether any agitation from internal or external sources is affecting them'

'Whether any Soldiers' Councils have been formed'.

The information was needed 'with a view to the establishment of an efficient Intelligence Service whereby the Army Council can keep its finger on the pulse of the troops'. The facts were required 'for the information of the Secretary of State for War' (then Winston Churchill).

Nearly 60 years later the debate still makes fascinating reading. Better than many a learned thesis it reveals the arrogance and duplicity of the ruling class and the cringing of the trade union bureaucrats turned professional politicians.

According to Winston Churchill the queries in the Circular, analysed over a 4 month period, had produced the following replies :

'Troops may be relied on to assist the civil power to preserve the public peace and to protect persons and property. They resent unofficial strikes .. . and realise their duty as citizens in repressing disorderly persons.'

'They deprecate being used in "strike breaking" and the general feeling is that it would not be fair to ask troops to do what they themselves would consider "blackleg" work.'

'Troops will parade for drafts overseas with the exception of Russia.'

Then, as now, the War Office was as interested in industrial relations as the Board of Trade or, later, the Ministry of Labour. Then, as now, there was no doubt as to whose side they were on. What was relatively unique about the episode was that as a result of a series of bureaucratic bungles the military establishment was forced to discuss openly (even if only very partially) a number of important matters that until then they had managed to disci only among themselves.

THE NAVY

Whilst the mutinies in the German and French Navies have been well documented little information is available concerning the Royal Navy. (49) There was, however, considerable talk of mutiny at Portsmouth, in the summer of 1918. The threat was serious enough for Lionel Yexley, an admiralty agent, (50) to write a report warning the Admiralty of impending trouble. This was only averted by immediate improvements in pay and conditions. Demands for 'lower deck' organisation were taken seriously. Agitation for trade union representation was spreading throughout the Navy.

The material conditions of the sailors certainly justified a mutiny. Between 1852 and 1917

there had only been one pay increase, amounting to a penny a day, in 1912. Wartime inflation had reduced the sailors' nineteen pence a day to a mere pittance. Another twopence a day was granted in 1917, plus a miserable separation allowance of ten shillings and six pence a week, for wives. Following a series of mutinies in 1919 pay increases of over two hundred per cent were granted.

After the Russian Revolution the British Navy was sent into action against the Russians. It proved ineffective, but this ineffectiveness had less to do with the efforts of the Bolsheviks than with the unwillingness of the British seamen to fight. The extent of these mutinies can be measured by reference to the following comment made in the House of Commons by G.

Lambert MP, on March 12 1919:

'. . .undoubtedly there was, at the end of last year, grave unrest in the Navy. .. I do not wish to be violent, but I think I am correct in saying that a match would have touched off an explosion.' (51) Shortly after the armistice with Germany the crew of a light cruiser, at Libau on the Baltic, mutinied. Many other ships were sent home from Archangel and Murmansk after similar experiences. In spite of a propaganda campaign against Russia it was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain reliable crews. Refusals to weigh for Russia were a regular occurrence at Invergordon, Portsmouth, Rosyth, Devonport and Fort Edgar.

We have heard a great deal from labour historians about the refusal of dockers to load the

'Jolly George' with an arms consignment for Poland in May 1920. But we have heard virtually nothing about far greater challenges to authority in the armed forces. For example, early in 1919 a group of dock workers discovered that the destination of a large cruiser being refitted at Rosyth was Russia. Together with some members of the Socialist Labour Party they leafleted the crew, who refused to sail. In fact the crew stayed put for three weeks,

although isolated in mid-stream, until their demands were met and they were paid off at Portsmouth.

In January 1919 there were mutinies on the mine-sweepers at Rosyth. On January 13, 1919

there was a mutiny on the patrol boat 'Kilbride' at Milford Haven, where the red flag was hoisted. This was an uneasy year for the Admiralty. On October 12, one hundred and fifty seamen had broken out of their ships at Port Edgar on hearing that they were due to return to the Baltic. The First Destroyer Flotilla was prevented from returning to the Baltic war.

Eventually half the ships sailed on August 14, their crews made up from Atlantic Fleet battleships. Although most of the mutineers were arrested, some 44 men made their way to London to present petitions at Whitehall. They were arrested at King's Cross and sent to Chatham Barracks. (52) Between October 12 and November 21, 1919 some ninety six offenders had been arrested and punished, ten by imprisonment. (53) It should be remembered that the government had repeatedly pledged that only volunteers would be sent to fight against the Russians. It is clear that this was not the practice employed by the Admiralty. Those who did not intend to 'volunteer' had little choice but to mutiny and face the consequences.

By November 1919 discontent had spread to the aircraft carrier 'Vindictive' in Copenhagen.

A marine detachment was called in to disperse a group of seamen demanding leave. Two men were arrested. Later two stokers were caught trying to stop the fan engines. They were each given five years. The following morning virtually no one turned up for duty. This provoked Captain Grace to arrest five more

alleged 'ringleaders'. They were condemned to ninety days hard labour before a dishonourable discharge. Another six were arrested, but resistance continued. The next morning 14 crewmen were still refusing duty and were arrested. That evening another two arrests were made. (53a)

Meanwhile the crews of the minesweepers operating in the Baltic declared they had had enough. There were incidents aboard the flagship 'Delhi', in December, when only 25% of the crew responded to a command to return to Biorko in the Gulf of Finland.

There was a further naval mutiny in Russia, that of the gunboat 'Cicala' in the White Sea.

Death sentences were imposed on the 'ringleaders'. The fact that these were later commuted to one year's imprisonment reflects the continuing strength of the sailors' movement. (54) Mutinies in the forces of intervention were not confined to the Navy. There was a large mutiny in a Marine battalion at Murmansk. The 6th Battalion of the Royal Marines, formed in the summer of 1919 at a time of unrest over demobilisation, were originally intended to police Schleswig Holstein. But, at short notice, the Battalion had been diverted to cover the evacuation of Murmansk. They were sent to the Lake Onega region, a further 300 miles south of Kem. In August 1919 two companies refused duty : 90 men were tried and found guilty of mutiny by a court martial. 13 men were sentenced to death and others to up to 5 years imprisonment.

None of the death sentences were actually carried out. The ninety mutineers were shipped to Bodmin prison, where they continued their resistance to arbitrary authority. (In this they were acting in the best traditions of the Royal Marines. In December 1918 some Marines had been involved in a mutiny inside Bodmin prison which had resulted in three death sentences, later commuted to five years penal servitude.) Continued resistance paid off. The ninety men arrested after the Murmansk incident had their sentences reduced as follows : the 13

sentenced to death were commuted to five years, but 12 were released after only one year, and the other after two years. Twenty men, originally given 5 years, were released after six months. Fifty one men sentenced to two years were also released within six months.

In recognition of the fact that their officers had acted contrary to Army instructions in employing young and inexperienced lads at the front, the remainder of those arrested were either released or had their sentences commuted to 6 months. Following the announcement, on December 22, 19 of these acts of 'clemency' the First Lord of the Admiralty told the Commons that 'bad leadership' was a factor behind the mutiny. He even hinted at the possibility of disciplinary measures being taken against several officers.

Many other mutinies occurred in North Russia. One took place in the 13th Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment, which ended with death sentences being passed on two sergeants whilst the other mutineers were cowed by White Russian machine gunners called in by the English officers.

News of these mutinies was suppressed. They highlighted the reluctance of British sailors to fight against Russia when the government was theoretically committed to a policy of peace.

Contrary to what the people were being told, and at the very moment when the hysteria surrounding the Armistice was at its height, the Foreign Office and Admiralty were finalising their arrangements for intervention in Russia.

The Navy was not only required for the anti-Bolshevik crusade and to defend Britain's imperial commitments. It was also needed to quell internal disturbances. Towards the end of the 1914-1918 war seamen were trained in the noble art of 'blacklegging' in the event of strikes by railwaymen or power workers. 'The battleship Vanguard', says Walter Kendall,

'was sent to the Mersey to command Liverpool during the Police strike of August 1919'. (56) Resistance in the Navy continued between 1919 and the time of the Invergordon mutiny. (57) In 1930 there were no fewer than six major movements within the Navy against conditions of work and the arbitrary injustice of naval discipline. The 'Revenge', 'Royal Oak', Vindictive',

'Repulse', 'Ramillies' and 'Lucia' were all affected.

THE RUSSIAN FRONT

There is some evidence of fraternisation between Russian revolutionaries and the allied armies sent to put them down, even in the Northern Sector. In December 1918 an occupation of the barracks by Russians of the First Archangel Company, who were sympathetic to the revolution, was supported by fraternising allied troops, who picketed the town so as to shut it off from the barracks. The mutiny was suppressed when Russian NCOs, under British command, mortared the barracks, killing at least one innocent civilian bystander.

In February 1919 men of the Yorkshire Regiment refused to march on Seletskoe. Two sergeants, delegated to express the battalion's refusal to fight, were arrested, court-martialled and sentenced to be shot. In the light of 'secret' orders from the King prohibiting executions after the Armistice, these sentences were later commuted to life imprisonment. News of the Yorkshire's mutiny spread rapidly through the allied forces. The first to follow suit were the French battalion at Archangel, who refused to return from leave.

Much has been said about the determination of Russian workers to protect the revolution from the Western allies. What has rarely been recorded is how weak the Bolshevik armed forces were. When clashes with the allied Navy occurred, Bolshevik commanders often surrendered immediately. And the few planes the RAF had commandeered easily took command of the air. In one instance an RAF pilot was able to follow a Bolshevik plane to its aerodrome and land there, after shooting it up, before making a safe return. The ultimate Bolshevik military victory was not due to the superiority of Lenin's forces in the field, but to the decision of the Allies to pull out - a decision largely influenced by the mood of their own soldiers. Major setbacks on the battlefield were largely due to vast numbers of Whites going over to the other side, rather than the superior forces of the Bolshevik armies.

In June 1919, in spite of the fact that the Bolshevik forces on the Dvina were on their knees, the Hampshire Regiment refused contact and withdrew from the battle. To prevent similar acts of indiscipline the ringleaders were sent home for demobilisation. Maintaining discipline, however, proved to be more difficult than it was thought. On July 7 the Slavo-British Legion, which had been at Dvina for only 3 days, mutinied, killing five British officers and four Russian

officers. Several mutineers called for volunteers to join the Bolsheviks and some 50 did so, another 50 deserting. Two of the mutineers were captured, tried and shot. The rest of the battalion was disarmed and turned into a labour unit.

The situation in Russia was unique. Here was an army inflicting heavy losses on the Bolshevik forces, breaking through their lines with relative ease, and yet, from the reports of mutinies, it was evident that the whole Archangel force might easily collapse. It is against this background that we can understand the decision to withdraw allied troops from Russia.

By September 1919 the evacuation of an army, scarcely damaged by Bolshevik forces, was well under way.

MUTINY AT KINMEL PARK CAMP

In the autumn of 1918 Kinmel Park Camp (and its hospital) were assigned to the Canadian authorities, under Camp Commandant M.A. Colquhoun. The camp was to be a 'concentration area', conveniently situated in North Wales, only a few miles from Liverpool and its docks.

The only trouble was that the authorities showed little intention of doing any demobilising.

Weeks passed. Few men left for home. Day after day the authorities told the men that their ships had been cancelled, laying the blame upon striking dockworkers. But they did not explain how it was possible for American and Australian troops to sail for home, in their thousands, each week.

Conditions at Kinmel Park were unspeakable. The living standards of the 'returning heroes'

were inferior to those in enemy prison camps. Men were sleeping on damp and draughty floors, with very few blankets. There was insufficient coal for fires. The food was described as little better than pigswill.

The soldiers in the camp had been involved in some of the heaviest fighting of the war. Yet, instead of victory parades and peacetime celebrations, they were obliged to watch their comrades die of influenza. Equally rankling was the discrepancy Ln the scale of wartime pensions between officers and the ranks. 'I had my pension fixed at $600', a blind veteran was to tell his comrades in 1920. 'I want to know how it is that the eyes of a Brigadier-General in

Canada are worth $2700, while my eyes are only worth $600'.

One of the immediate grievances was that recruits who had only just come over from Canada were being sent back first. From the end of 1916 it had been accepted that the disbandment of Canadian troops would Cake place on a 'first in, first out' basis, modified by marital status.

But this was fiercely opposed by General Currie and Sir Robert Borden who, along with other senior officers, secretly longed for the preservation of the

Canadian Forces on an armed footing beyond the Armistice. Currie's views were overruled by the Privy Council, but Borden pressured Sir Thomas White (acting Canadian Prime Minister) to reconsider Currie's plan to retain the troops until they could be returned in complete units. The Currie plan was eventually accepted, amid great administrative confusion.

Dissatisfaction in the camp grew, aggravated by the news of every ship cancellation. It was becoming clear that the economic prospects for returning troops were grim and that this was an important factor in delaying their demobilisation. There were gloomy reports from troops who had returned concerning discrimination in the job market in favour of officers.

Severe unemployment in Canada was coupled with an aggressive anti-working class policy.

There were 12,000 unemployed in Montreal alone, and a similar number in Toronto. The Canadian war debt stood at over £400 million. As usual the working classes were expected to make the necessary 'sacrifices' for economic recovery. Lay-offs and wage cuts led to industrial unrest. Some troops sent to quell rioting strikers had started to fraternise with them.

Returning soldiers were adding fuel to flames, presenting a very serious threat to the status quo.

On the whole, Canadian trade union leaders sided with the authorities. As a result they were ignored by the rank and file. Tom Moore, President of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress, was booed off the platform at a public meeting in Toronto. During the war Orders in Council had prohibited meetings of socialists and the circulation of socialist literature.

Heavy sentences had been imposed for breach of this law. The Canadian authorities held that

'aliens' (mainly Russian immigrants) were violating these Orders in Council. Plans were produced for the deportation of these 'aliens'.

Early in 1919 the 'aliens' had held a mass meeting and drawn up the following statement: 'We do not wish to be sent to England as strike-breakers. Nor do we want to be compelled to take up arms against our own people. Let us leave Canada as free agents, just as we came, to go where we will. We appeal to the

workers of Canada and to the soldiers to protect themselves by seeing that justice is done to us. Our cause, in reality, is their cause - for they will have to combat the same elements in the endeavour to make the world better for themselves and their children'. (58)

This protest was circulated to workers and to troops, and was translated into seven languages.

News of these events, and of the ill-treatment of the 'aliens', filtered back to the Canadians at Kinmel. The unbearable situation in the camp and the depressing news from home combined to ripen the conditions for mutiny. The final straw was the arrival of newspapers from home carrying pictures of a hero's welcome being given to soldiers who had seen no fighting at all.

On Tuesday March 4, 1919 a meeting was held by the soldiers of Montreal Camp. A strike committee was elected. On it was a young Russian called William Tarasevich (often referred

to in the press as Tarashaitch or Tarouke). He was picked to give the signal to start the mutiny. The objective was to take over each of the 21 camps, between them involving 15,000

to 20,000 men.

The newspapers gave contradictory reports of what happened. On March 7, 1919, The Times ran a story under the headline: 'Riot in Canadian Camp: Twelve Killed and Many Injured. VC

Trampled to Death'.

'A serious disturbance by Canadian soldiers occurred at Kinmel Military Camp, near Rhyl, on Tuesday and Wednesday. As a result twelve lives were lost, including that of a Major of New Brunswick who had gained the VC. About twenty others were injured. In addition damage estimated at £50,000 was done to the camp. '

The article went on to describe how Kinmel was a dispersal camp for Canadian soldiers, waiting for ships to take them home. It pointed out that the men in the camp were mainly from France. During the last year they had been through some of the fiercest fighting. Their patience had been exhausted during the weeks of

delay at Kinmel. The article continued:

'On Tuesday night, the men held a mass meeting, which was followed by a mad riot. The outbreak began in Montreal Camp at 9.30 pm with a cry "Come on the Bolsheviks", which is said to have been given by a Canadian soldier who is Russian. The men rushed to the officers'

quarters, helped themselves to all the liquor they could find, then went for the stores, disarmed the guards, and with their rifles smashed doors and windows, helping themselves to the content of the stores. Boxes of cigarettes and cigars were thrown all about the ground.

Then they went out to wreck the whole camp. One portion, where tradesmen's shops supplied soldiers, was stripped and in a few moments not a shop was left standing. The Church Army and Salvation Army buildings, however, were not touched. The rioters then proceeded to the quarters occupied by the girls, who were in bed, and carried away their clothes. The girls were not injured, but had to remain in bed the next day because they could not dress themselves. Next day, the rioters were masquerading about the camp in girls' clothing.

By mid-day on Wednesday the camp appeared as if it had been passed over by legions of tanks. Unfortunately a brewer's dray containing 48 barrels of beer arrived at the camp. The men took fire buckets, broke the barrels and drank the beer. Then they started shooting all round. In one of the distant parts of the camp a young soldier stood on guard and attempted to do his duty. In reply to his challenge one of the rioters shot him dead.

A little later a major from New Brunswick, who had gained the VC, attempted to interfere, but in his endeavour to hold the rioters back from such portion of the officers' quarters that was not demolished, he was thrown down and trampled to death. Another officer, going amongst the rioters, was so badly mauled that he died a few hours later.

During this time some of the men had been arrested. The rioters demanded the release of the men. The colonel refused, and the rioters released the men themselves. The whole disturbance was quelled by night and the ringleaders, numbering about twenty, and stated to be mostly of foreign extraction, were taken away. The Canadian soldiers in the camp, while explaining the cause of the affair, are now regretting it. They say that they did not anticipate that it would go

to such lengths, and the mob went further than it meant to.

The disturbance caused great alarm in Rhyl, when it was reported that 5,000 to 6,000 men of

the camp were going to raze the town.

Yesterday an officer from the War Office arrived at the camp by aeroplane and found everything calm. He addressed the men, telling them it was murder for Canadians to kill Canadians. He gave them an assurance that within a few days about half of the Canadians in the camp should be on their way home. The others would follow quickly. This statement was cheered by the men who said it was all they wanted.'

This is a neat, compact story informing the country of a riot by drunken Canadians led by a Russian. Private property had been damaged. Drunken soldiers had gone on a blood-spilling orgy, firing their guns and trampling someone to death. Not an ordinary soldier, but (oh, horror!)an officer with a VC.

Things hadn't been quite that simple. News of the mutiny reached Parliament. On Monday March 10, 1919 at question time, Mr Me Master asked the Secretary of State for War

'whether he could make a statement regarding the regrettable discontent and breach of discipline amongst soldiers at a Welsh camp awaiting shipment to their homes, on conclusion of long and meritorious service in the field'. Captain Guest, Joint Parliamentary Secretary for the Treasury, replied:

'A court of inquiry has been set up by the Canadian Military Authorities to investigate thoroughly the whole affair. I think the House will agree with me that as the matter is sub judice it would be improper for me to make a statement. The Canadian Military Authorities have issued a statement which was published in Saturday morning's papers'. A statement had appeared in The Times on the morning of Saturday, March 8. Under the headline : 'The Camp Riot: Further Details', the article 'stated :

'All was quiet yesterday at Kinmel Park, North Wales. It was officially stated that the casualties were five killed and twenty one wounded. The inquest on the victims was opened yesterday, and adjourned until next week. Brigadier General M. A. Colquhoun, in a statement yesterday morning, said that no attack was

made on the officers who were treated with the greatest courtesy. "I myself", he went on to say, "went in and out amongst the men freely.

Some of them actually put down their loot in order to salute me, and then picked up their loot again. Reports of the damage are greatly exaggerated. Some fifty or sixty men got out of hand, and attacked some canteens. The men in one camp, anticipating danger, armed themselves and, contrary to express orders, fired. That was on Wednesday, when the fatalities occurred. The girls' camp was not attacked. As a matter of fact the girls were treated with the utmost chivalry. No man entered the girls' bedrooms while they were occupied. One man raised the red flag in an attempt to introduce Bolshevism, but was shot".

In view of the splendid discipline and record uniformly maintained by Canadian troops since the beginning of the war in England and France, the "incident" at Kinmel Park is regretted. It is considered that by comparison with others discipline amongst the Canadian troops is of a high order. It is also regretted that reports of the incident have been exaggerated. Immediately after the Armistice, Kinmel Park was secured as a concentration area through which Canadian troops stationed near Liverpool could pass through to Canada. All documentation is completed there, and the troops are sorted into drafts, according to their destination in Canada. Considering the shortage of shipping, the Canadian authorities congratulate themselves upon the splendid record they have for sending troops to Canada.

In the month of February (1919), however, the Ministry of Shipping were unable to furnish sufficient ships to carry out the programme as promised to the Canadians. Owing to this the programme in February and early March had fallen short by one third. This had caused the

"backing up" of troops from Kinmel Park through to areas in England, through to France.

This had caused disappointment to the Canadians, some of whom had been overseas, without seeing home, for four years . . .

Immediately upon the matter being reported to the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir Richard Turner VC, KCB, he went to Kinmel Park and addressed the men in fifteen different places. They seemed to appreciate his explanations and there is not likely to be any further disturbances ...

If the number of men originally planned for February had been allowed to embark, it is thought that there would have been no trouble. But the shipping situation, owing to strikes and other reasons, is admittedly a difficult matter to control. It is however hoped that there will not be a recurrence of the delays which have hitherto taken place.

It is not attempted, in the slightest degree, to excuse the misconduct of the men who took part in the disturbance. Many of the offenders have already been placed under arrest and these, with others involved, will be rigorously dealt with.

During the disturbance a certain amount of damage was done, and it was discovered that civilians were concerned. Up to the present twelve of these civilians have been arrested and handed over to the local authorities. (My emphasis - DL) (58a) During the disturbance three rioters were killed and two men on picket duty. Twenty one soldiers were wounded, of whom two were officers. There is no foundation to the report that a Major, who was a VC, was killed or injured. The troops at Kinmel Park are concentrated in units representing the military districts of Canada to which they will proceed. They are not in their original units, these wings being composite formations consisting of personnel belonging to many different units. This sorting out is done in deference to the wishes of the authorities in Canada, in order to avoid delay when they reach the Dominion.

A court of inquiry, of which Brigadier J.O.MacBrian CB, CMG, DSO, is President, has been convened to make a thorough investigation into all circumstances in connexion with the disturbance". (From the Ministry of Overseas Forces of Canada.) This statement was backed by a Times editorial which praised the previous disciplinary record of the Canadian Army, adding that

'discipline to an army is what honour is to a woman. Once lost it can never be restored'. (59) A closer look at the official statement is warranted. It argues that dissatisfaction over the failure to obtain ships had led to the disturbance. This was a feeble excuse. Throughout the winter of 1918-19, at a time of high unemployment, over 1000 ships were standing idle, awaiting repair. (60) No attempt was made to secure the use of neutral ships for the repatriation of Canadian troops. This could only have meant that the authorities had other plans for them, such as sending them to Russia. Or it might have meant that the Canadian government, troubled by militancy and unrest at home, were not eager

to add a lot of soldiers

- many with revolutionary ideas - to the melting pot of grievances.

On Monday March 10 The Times retracted its first account of the mutiny. Under a very small

'Editor's note' the following appeared:

'We are requested by Major C. Stephenson, commanding Number Four Military District Concentration Wing Camp 16 (Montreal Camp), Kinmel Park, Rhyl, who writes on behalf of the officers, NCOs and men of Montreal Camp to contradict the statement which appeared in The Times on Friday, that the recent outbreak began in Montreal District Camp. The Montreal officers, NCOs and men in fact gave all their efforts to, and were largely responsible for, the quelling of the rioters. We are glad to publish this authoritative denial, which was written before the issue of the official account of the outbreak, and the more reassuring version which we published from our special correspondent on Saturday. It is to be regretted that the authorities were unable to issue their official statement a day earlier'. (61) From this and other accounts in the press it is obvious that everything was being done to minimise the incident. This is not surprising in view of the precarious situation then pertaining in the British Army. It was certainly unwise from the point of view of the authorities to give any credence to reports of any political motivation behind the mutiny. The net result was a series of inaccurate reports, followed by denials. Serious readers must have been left completely baffled.

KINMEL: A RECONSTRUCTION

What follows is an attempt to reconstruct what really happened during the Kinmel mutiny.

The sworn statements of people who participated in the events of March 4 and 5, 1919 are recorded in the minutes of the Coroner's Inquest held on March 20, 1919. (The transcript is available in the County Records Office, Hawarden, Clwyd.) Some of the accounts require close examination, for they point to very obvious contradictions in the officers' testimonies.

On the evening of March 4 the men held a meeting during which they elected delegates. At a given signal they took over several of the camps. There was a

minimum of violence and no firearms were used. The majority of the troops supported the mutiny. By 10.30 pm most of the camps were in a state of open revolt. The 'Tin Town Stores' were occupied. The officers were powerless and offered no resistance. There was little or no looting.

One officer, Lieutenant G. Gauthier, who saw the initial outbreak, was allowed to return unmolested to Camps 19 and 20 (these two camps, which housed a number of officers, were the only two not occupied by the mutineers). There, he prepared his fellow officers for resistance. The following morning Gauthier, minus his badges, mingled with the men, posing as a private. His aim was to identify 'leaders', so that at the earliest opportunity they could be separated from the rank-and-file. Meanwhile, the officers and 'loyal' men of Camps 19 and 20

were completing their defence arrangements, setting up pickets at strategic points. A guard of 50 men had already spent the night at the entrance to Camp 20, preventing any contact between the inmates and mutineers from other camps.

On March 5, at 14. 15 hrs. Lieutenant Gauthier approached a group of soldiers standing outside the Bakery and warned them to keep away from Camp 20. The men sent him retreating under a barrage of stones, jeers and catcalls.

At 2.30 pm the mutineers assembled and an advance party led the way towards Camps 19 and 20. This group was itself led by two men carrying a red flag on two poles. Three other men carried smaller red flags which they used to give signals to the main body of men, some way behind. The advance party approached the officers of Camps 19 and 20 and attempted to negotiate. No negotiations ever took place. As they approached, an officer was seen to give

an order. A group of guards immediately attacked the advance party of mutineers, capturing several of them. The prisoners were dragged off to the Guardhouse In Camp 20.

This action delayed the advance of the main body of mutineers. But they continued to come on, armed with a few stones and rifle butts.

Meanwhile the officers and guards were entrenched around Camp 20, the Records Office and the Guard Room. The mutineers tried to force their way into the Guard Room and release the prisoners. The attempt was beaten off. The mutineers then took up positions in Camp 18, facing the officers.

George Copley, a Company Sergeant Major in the Royal Engineers, made the following written deposition:

'At 2.30 pm I saw a number of rioters enter the gateway of Camp 20. Two men were leading, with a red flag on two poles. The crowd went to the Guard Room and I could hear their leaders say "Let's have them out". Stones were thrown through the windows of the Guard Room and two or three of their leaders seized fire buckets from their hooks and smashed the windows with them. Then they moved off towards No. 18 Camp canteen. Shortly afterwards I saw a crowd collect near the roadway and make a rush between the huts of No. 18 Camp.

They were armed with sticks and stones and one or two rifles. I noticed that one of the rifles had a bayonet fixed. Immediately afterwards, I heard shots coming from the direction of No.

20 Camp - I advised my staff to take cover, which they did.' That the firing was started by the officers is borne out by the following statement from an independent eye-witness. Mr William Spicer, a representative of the firm of Balfour Beatty & Co. , War Department Agents. He wrote :

'I saw a number of rioters coming through Camp 18 mess huts towards No. 20 Camp. When they saw the soldiers standing outside the Guardhouse they stopped. They lingered about for some time, then got orders from the direction of Camp 20. The rioters still remained. Then the soldiers of Camp 20 charged. The rioters resisted with sticks and stones. But I saw one rifle amongst the rioters. After a few minutes' pause the soldiers from Camp 20 returned back to their trenches. One soldier was wounded by the Blacksmith's Shop and was taken away by others.

A soldier came down towards the Blacksmith's Shop and said to two other soldiers standing by me : "who done the firing?" The two soldiers replied: "that lot from Camp 20". He then said to his pals: "wait here until I come back, I know where I can get some rifles". Not long after this there was another charge by the men from Camp 20 at the mutineers (who were now armed with a few rifles). One rioter was taken prisoner and marched towards Camp 20.

The rioters then cleared back into other camps'. Another eye-witness, Arthur D. Abel, also of Balfour Beatty & Co. , confirmed that the officers had attacked first. Apparently quite a lot of firing took place. Those in Camp 20 were

indiscriminate in their choice of targets. Jack Merritt, a driver" in the Canadian Field Artillery, said:

'At 3 pm I was with a gunner called Jack Hickman. We were between the two huts in the lines at No. IS Camp. As we were standing talking together he was struck by a bullet and fell.

He did not speak, dying almost immediately. At the time a number of soldiers were firing on Camp 19. He was therefore struck by a stray bullet as he was not taking part in the disturbances'. (62) Concerning the same episode Robert Bowie, a Lance-Corporal in the

Royal Engineers assigned to Camp 18, testified that he was in huts 21 and 25 of Camp 18

when two Canadian soldiers came running along the duck-boards, one with a rifle and fixed bayonet, the other with a stick. When they got to the corner of the hut one of them turned round and looked back and was struck by a bullet. He then fell at Bowie's feet. The latter carried him into hut 21. During the next few minutes several bullets entered the building but there were no further casualties.

Let us now look at the evidence given by officers and NCOs from Camp 20. Their statements at the forementioned inquest on the five men killed during the Kinmel mutiny.

They were not submitted as evidence at the inquest, however (i.e. those who made the statements were not liable to cross-examination). Three days before the inquest, on March 17

1919 the Coroner had received a note from the Canadian President of the Canadian Army's Court of Inquiry saying: 'I regret very much that I cannot furnish you with any statements from officers, which you ask for, as our proceedings are confidential and cannot be made public at present'.

Superintendent Lindsay of Rhyl Constabulary had however managed to obtain some statements without the knowledge of the Canadian authorities. They were marked CONFIDENTIAL. Today they comprise the only existing 'official' record of the events. The evidence contained in these statements concerning the use of firearms does not square with what was said by the civilian witnesses.

According to Sergeant E.V. Collier, DSO, 'at about 13. 00 hrs organised bodies of men approached Camp 20 across the open space of ground opposite Camp 20 Orderly Room. The men were advancing carrying a red flag, in open orders and under leaders. They were armed, firing live ammunition. Twice they were driven back by Camp 20 men and we were able to assist MD1 on the rioters' left flank and front. After the capture of some of the leaders, the white flag was shown and altogether about 22 rioters were captured. Two went to hospital and five left in a lorry under escort. The balance were dealt with by MD1.'

Attached to the statement was a list of names of the rioters dealt with by Officers.

Unfortunately this roll is not now available. It would have provided crucial information as to the fate of those who took part in the mutiny. Where is this roll today? What light could it throw on the mystery still hanging over the affair? In St. Margaret's Church at Bodelwyddan (near the camp) are 83 Canadian graves. The official explanation is that the men died during the influenza epidemic of 1918-19. But rumours still circulate amongst local inhabitants that in some of these graves lie the bodies of mutineers, executed after the events of March 1919.

We know 75 arrests were made (some reports say 79). Whilst the dates on the headstones vary, several of them record death as having occurred in March 1919. Whether or not any of those arrested lie in these graves we may never know. But amongst the graves of the

'influenza' victims are stones bearing the names of Tarasevich, Glllan, Young and Haney, all of whom met with violent deaths.

The following statement comes from W. H. Bremmer, the Provost Sergeant of Department 6, Camp 19. It was submitted to his superior officer on March 7, 1919 :

'On Wednesday 5th March (time 14.30 hrs) the rioters marched on Camp 20. They started to raid the Officers' Mess and were immediately set upon by the boys of Camp 20. A few were arrested and placed in the Guard Room of Camp 20, the remainder making good their escape

across the opposite field.

The rioters reorganised and marched on towards Camp 20, with rifles, etc. I was standing talking alongside Mr Carlisle when he told me to go along with him. I did so, and joined in the attack against the rioters, capturing one of them whom I marched to the Guard Room. I then returned and found the rioters using live ammunition. I returned to the Guard Room and got a rifle and four rounds of ammunition. But when I got back the boys had charged and rushed the rioters back to the rear of ASC. The rioters charged and rushed back to Camp 20.

A number of shots were fired from Camp 20, inflicting casualties amongst the rioters. When they were beaten they hoisted the white flag. I immediately rushed out and placed under arrest all the men that I noticed to be with the rioters. I had some escorted back to Camp 19

Guard Room, where all the valuables were taken off them. One of my prisoners went to hospital and the remaining 5 were handed over to the Regimental Sergeant Major'. Sergeant Bremmer then stated that he had obtained ammunition and that his men were actually firing at the mutineers. This is corroborated by another eye-witness, Captain Douglas Forbes-Scott:

'At 14.30 I went down to the Camp Orderly Room. Camp 20 men were lined up in a defensive position in and on the trenches alongside the road. Opposite the ASC stable the rioters were lined up. Camps 19 and 20 charged over the ground and brought back some of the rioters. They went over a second time and were met with rifle fire. Three of them (the mutineers - DL) were hit and they hoisted the white flag. Previously they had been displaying the red flag and urging men to attack the camp. I afterwards heard of the death of Private Gillan by one of the rioters.' Private Gillan was killed in the battle with the mutineers after the initial fighting. His death occurred when the mutineers obtained weapons after the first attack from Camp 20. Sergeant Henry Roberts of Camp 19 testified as follows :

'On Wednesday at 3.30 pm I was one of a party detailed by MD6 to repel the rioters who were endeavouring to invade the camp. Private David Gillan and myself along with several others advanced across the training ground towards AS Corps stables where the rioters were hiding. Many of them were advancing carrying the red flag, in open order, under leaders, and were armed, firing live ammunition. Twice they were driven back by Camp 19 and 20 men.

After the capture of some of their leaders a white flag was shown. Of the 22 rioters captured, 7 were by us, and fifteen were captured by Military District No.

L, Camp 20. During the fight Private David Gillan was struck by a bullet In the neck. I saw one of the rioters deliberately taking aim in a kneeling position. But just then another party came from behind and we fled, leaving Gillan'. According to the medical evidence submitted to the inquest, Gillan was shot in the back. If this was the case it could mean that the bullet came from the direction of Camp 20 since his back was turned in that direction. We have already seen evidence as to the use of firearms by the officers and men of Camp 20.

Many arrests were made during the hours following the battle. Gradually the authorities retained control. Seventy five men were eventually taken away and charged with mutiny.

Following a Court of Inquiry, presided over by Major-General Sir H.E. Burstall, KCB, CMC, there was a court-martial, presided over by the same General Burstall. Between April 16 and June 7, 1919 Burstall tried 38 cases, involving 50 prisoners charged with mutiny and other offences. Seventeen were acquitted, 27 convicted of mutiny. Six more were found guilty of minor charges. Sentences ranged from 90 days to ten years. It is difficult to find out what happened to the others. Were they released? Did they die of 'influenza'? It appears that all the leaders were arrested, with the exception of the 'Russian' : Sapper William Tarasevich. His stomach was ripped out with a bayonet, by 'persons unknown'. On that same afternoon four

other men are known to have died: namely David Gillan, Jack Hickman, Corporal Joseph Young and Gunner William Lyie Haney.

At the inquest on March 20, 1919 the medical evidence concerning the causes of death was as follows :

- Corporal Joseph Young, aged 38, died MMarch 5, 1919 at the Military Hospital, Kinmel Camp, from the effect of a bayonet wound in the head. - William Lyie Haney died, aged 22, at KKinmel Camp, from a bullet wound in the head.

- William Tarasevich, aged 26, was killeed at Kinmel Camp, his abdomen pierced by a bayonet.

- David Gillan, aged 20, died as a resullt of being shot by a rifle.

- Jack Hickman, aged 21, died as a resullt of being shot by a rifle. In his opening

address to the jury the Coroner had said that, contrary to the prevailing rumours, he was satisfied that the Canadian authorities would place all their information at the disposal of the Court. Yet, as we have pointed out, he had received a note from the Canadian President of the Court of Inquiry stating that its proceedings were 'confidential'. The Coroner assured the jury that the Canadian authorities would allow facilities for witnesses to come forward. This promise was never kept. The hearing was a travesty, even of its own limited terms of reference. What were the Establishment trying to hide? Many witnesses had been spirited away with the 5000

Canadian soldiers who sailed the previous week on the White Star liner 'Olympic'. We know that the local police had issued a summons for Sapper 249685 M. Chaka (of Camp 11) to attend as a key witness. The summons was returned by the Canadian authorities with a note explaining that Chaka had sailed for Canada on March 13 and would therefore be unable to attend.

The Coroner concluded his opening address with the warning that 'as proceedings develop, it may appear that one or more persons may become open to accusations of having been criminally responsible for the deaths of these men'. But that was as far as he would venture.

That very morning he had received a telegram from the Home Office informing him that 'the Canadian authorities are investigating the matter and intend to try by Court-Martial any person found criminally responsible'.

Although they put in a nominal appearance at the inquest the Canadian authorities were determined to handle the matter themselves. In the witness box Major C.W. Maclean testified how he saw the mutineers approach, led by the red flag. Following the initial stone-throwing he had been called to an orderly room to communicate with Headquarters. When he returned Private Gillan was dead: shot. Maclean then went to his Headquarters and stayed there until 5

pm. He added that the previous night he had received an 'intimation' that there was going to be trouble. When asked whether the rioters were armed, he admitted that he did not see any of them with complete rifles. Those with guns had their stocks broken - the guns being used as clubs. His own party had been given 40 rifles. These had been served out at the 1.30 pm parade, as a precaution. But, Maclean said, no ammunition was supplied since there was none in the camp. Initially bayonets were not fixed. He had given express orders

to protect the Record Office : company commanders were left to take whatever action they deemed necessary.

Concluding his evidence the Major confirmed that 75 prisoners had been taken. Of the five dead men, only one was 'on his side'. He could not be sure whether the other men killed were rioters or lookers-on.

Lieutenant Gauthier also gave evidence. He said that Camp 20 was the last camp to be attacked. In all the other camps an organised defence had failed. He had particularly wanted to protect the Records Office, as all other records in the camp had been destroyed. When questioned about the shooting he testified that his men had disobeyed his orders.

This evidence was contradicted by the next witness, Major E.V. Collier. Collier claimed that the mutineers were the first to fire. They were led by one man: a Russian. When questioned as to the cause of the mutiny he replied that drink had helped to aggravate it. He knew of no dissatisfaction. A juryman asked him directly what its cause was.

He replied: 'part Russian, part drink'. Collier then described how, the previous day, expecting trouble, he had summoned his men and cautioned them not to use ammunition. A Juryman asked him why he bothered to caution them, since the previous witness had just said there was no ammunition in the camp. Collier replied: 'perhaps they might have brought some back from France, as souvenirs'.

The ammunition question was finally resolved when Major St George (Assistant Provost Marshall) said that 'no ammunition was given out. It was all stored in one place and the rioters never got at it'.

The evidence of Sergeant Bremmer reveals that there was ammunition available in the Guard Room of Camp 20. But it is clear that the mutineers had no access to it. How much of it was given out to the officers and men defending Camp 20 remains a mystery.

In his summing up the Coroner tried to cover up as best he could. He said: 'It is impossible for the jury to say that any person was responsible. There are contradictions in the evidence as to who fired the first shot ... I have informed the Home Office that there is no evidence to conclude that criminal charges should be brought against any individual'.

The jury duly returned an open verdict. They added:

'There is no evidence to say who inflicted the said wounds, or whether any person or persons are criminally responsible for the deaths of the deceased.'

KINMEL: AN ASSESSMENT

The fate of the Kinmel mutiny was due to a number of factors. First, the men failed to prevent the officers from preparing a defence in Camps 19 and 20. Lieutenant Gauthier was able to move about the camps at will, identifying ring-leaders and preparing the officers' resistance.

The only chance the mutineers had of achieving their objective would have been to obtain complete control of the whole Kinmel Park area. This should have been done on the first night, while they still had the initiative. By leaving Camps 19 and 20 alone the officers were given time to prepare their defences. Perhaps the most important factor contributing to their defeat was that the men left communications in the hands of the officers. Not every camp at

Kinmel was even kept aware of the rapidly evolving situation. Finally, the men underestimated the ruthlessness and determination of the officers. When a mutiny is under way there can be no unarmed approaches towards armed officers. Unless a mutiny is 100%

solid the authorities will use all means at their disposal to crush it. When 'necessary' they will not flinch from bloodshed.

On the credit side the mutiny achieved certain immediate gains. Shipping shortages or no, the mutiny altered repatriation plans. Ships materialised, as if by magic. Between the mutiny and March 25 some 15,000 troops left Kinmel. By the end of the month some 30,000 men had been repatriated.

The authorities had recognised that the only reliable weapon against mutiny was demobilisation. Those who had participated in the events had learned something of greater importance: that the war machine was not invincible.

Outside St. Margaret's Church at Bodelwyddan, not two minutes' walk from Kinmel Park, stand eighty three Canadian graves. They are arranged in four rows. 82 simple white slabs carry the numbers and regiments of the deceased. But there is a hierarchy even in death. A red sandstone cross dominates the white

slabs. On it are engraved the words 'To the proud memory of Private David Gillan, who was killed at Kinmel Park defending the honour of his country'.

Of those who died defending their rights to be human beings, Corporal (438680) Joseph Young, Gunner (1251417) William Lyie Haney and Sapper (1057297) William Tarasevich, of the Canadian Railway Troops, lie buried side by side, in the second row of graves, nearest to the church. This is a tightly packed row and something strange immediately strikes one.

How come the 19 men in this row lie buried so near to one another, when their deaths were as widely spaced in time as January 18, 1913 and April 6, 1919? (In the other three rows there is a great deal more clustering in the dates of death.) Were all the dead buried where they now lie, at the time of their death? Or were they reburied there, at some later date? How accurate are the dates on the tombstones? Were nearly all the deaths due to influenza - as the official version of events would have us believe? Were no reprisals exacted on the mutineers? And what exactly do the words 'Sometime, sometime, we will understand' on the tombstone of Corporal Joseph Young, really mean? Opinions are divided on these and other matters. Local people, including some formerly closely associated with St. Margaret's, believe that the church's burial register dealing with the period of the mutiny spent a while at the War Office.

A memorial dominates the Canadian section of the little graveyard. Above the maple leaf on the tombstone it proclaims : 'This memorial was erected by their comrades. Their name liveth for evermore'. A strange epitaph for the victims of an influenza epidemic, with only a marginal impact on the local civilian population.

THE CANADIANS AGAIN

Kinmel was not the last mutiny amongst Canadian troops stationed in Britain. Between November 1918 and June 1919 there were thirteen instances of riots and mutinies involving Canadian troops. A few months after the Kinmel events the authorities returned to their policy of delaying the demobilisation of Canadian troops. This was a contributory factor to a mutiny at a camp in Whitley, which was a repeat performance of Kinmel. On a Saturday

night (June 14-15, 1919) a large number of troops demonstrated against the delaying tactics of the authorities. The action was sparked by the arrest of some soldiers for gambling. An attempt was made to release them. This quickly flared up into a full-scale riot. The main targets were the camp shops (which had a reputation for overcharging), a theatre and a Salvation Army hut which were all burnt down. (63)

According to the authorities, the delays in repatriation were due to the Liverpool dock strike.

But in the 'Daily Herald' (June 17, 1919) a report on the mutiny stated that the soldiers'

actions had had nothing to do with the Liverpool dock strike. Nor was it a drunken rampage, as other newspapers had reported. An ultimatum had been issued by the soldiers that further action would follow if all their demands were not conceded. The authorities capitulated.

That same week there was a riot of Canadian troops at Woodcote Park, Epsom, following the arrest of some mutineers. Fierce fighting broke out between Canadian troops and British police during an attempt to release the arrested men from a nearby police station. In the fighting a police sergeant, Thomas Gallen, died of a fractured skull. Eight Canadian soldiers were charged with manslaughter. (64)

Without doubt, there were many other such incidents. Few ever found their way into the press.

As the British authorities soon learned, even the rigours of military prison did not damp the spark of mutiny. There were several instances of men convicted of mutiny going on to help with the organisation of resistance in prisons. The case of Private C. McDonnell, of the 3rd Canadian Machine Gun Corps, provides us with a good example. He was sentenced on January 21, 1919 by a Field General Court Martial to five years imprisonment on a joint charge of attempting to persuade members of H.M. Forces to join a mutiny and of taking part in a mutiny. He was sent to No. 7 Military Prison where he participated m another mutiny.

On March 24, 1919 he was sentenced to death. This sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. Another unsung hero disappeared into history.

SUMMER AND WINTER 1919-1920

Throughout the summer of 1919 mutinies continued to break out within the Allied Forces, frustrating the War Office's attempt to maintain a significant peace-time army. Mass meetings were held by soldiers serving in Kantara, Egypt, during which two men from each unit were elected to form a Central Committee. The Committee's task was to put forward the various grievances of the men, but it seemingly confined itself to what the press described as 'legal activities'. A meeting of 2500 men was recorded by a 'Daily Herald' reporter on June 4, 1919.

It ended peacefully with the singing of the National Anthem. Although the authorities issued orders forbidding meetings of the central delegation they also made vague promises about demobilisation. The promises were given a distinct sense of urgency when soldiers refused to do duties and set up their own guards. Despite orders forbidding meetings, the Kantara Soldiers' Council was still functioning as late as June 25.

Although a general amnesty for mutineers and other military offenders was never officially endorsed, continual unrest amongst the forces created an atmosphere in which the government was obliged to pursue a policy of 'clemency'. By the end of December 1919 out of an aggregate of 1600 years dished out as sentences, some 1200 years had been remitted.

Meanwhile repeated outbursts of mutiny in England continued to cause grave concern. At Aldershot 9000 reservists had been recalled to the army because of

the 'crisis' caused by the coal strike and the threatened rebellion in Ireland. They proved a very unwilling tool of repression. Early in May 1919 several hundred men made plans for a 'rising', predicting that

'soon the red flag will be flying over this town'. On Friday, May 6 a skirmish took place during which Superintendent W. Davis of the Aldershot Constabulary was injured. On Saturday the reservists, led by a private waving the red flag, ran wild in Union Street, Wellington Street, Gordon Road and Victoria Road. Later the soldier with a red flag was seen perched on top of a bus shouting 'Come on, the rebels'. Over 60 shops had their windows smashed and were looted, including a jeweller's. The men stuffed their pockets with diamonds, watches, etc., before hurling the clocks at local traders. The police were overcome but military loyalists attacked the rioters with bayonets and pick-axe handles. (65) In January 1920 the Chief of the Imperial General Staff warned the Cabinet that the army's inability to aid the civilian power constituted 'grave cause for anxiety'. He 'prohibited its employment except as a military force to be used only in the last extremity'. (66) In March 1920 the War Office estimated that only 25,000 (out of the 40,000 considered necessary for the maintenance of Home Security) would be available. These limited forces contained a high proportion of untrained soldiers with 'insufficient military discipline'. (67) **THE PEACE COMES TO LUTON**

How one interprets the mutinies of World War I depends on one's attitude to social change. If one is looking for a centralised overall strategy, one will only see a series of eruptions flaring up and dying out, some achieving their objective, others ending in failure. A mutiny may be defeated, or fragmented by demobilisation, but the participants live on, learn lessons and pass what they have learned on to others. Mutinies can only be understood as part of a wider movement of social upheaval, a movement which may include police as well as army and industry. It is a mistake to draw strict distinctions between military disturbances and other forms of social protest. A mutineer might cease to be a mutineer on the day he ceases to be a member of the armed forces. But he does not thereby cease to be a political animal nor will he forget the ties of comradeship forged during his fight with the military authorities.

During the summer of 1919 military unrest swept into civilian disturbances in many regions.

Employers and the authorities took advantage of the post-war depression to try

to impose the old bonds of discipline upon returning soldiers. Ex-servicemen were equally determined not to accept pre-war conditions. A fierce conflict took place during which the government and the employers never felt strong enough for a show-down until, with the aid of the TUC

General Council and an army purged of its dissident elements, the ruling class was able to defeat the workers during the General Strike of 1926. An adequate account of social upheaval between the Armistice of 1918 and the defeat of the General Strike has yet to be written.

What follows is a short account of an incident in Luton, where comradeship in arms was continued in a struggle against the civilian authorities.

The Peace Treaty was signed in June 1919. Luton Town Council planned processions with brass bands, floats, entertainment for the children and a fireworks display followed by an evening of official gluttony described as a 'Mayor's banquet'. The cost of the latter was to be paid from civic funds. Invitations were strictly limited to the Mayor, councillors and close

friends - none of whom had served in the armed forces. In fact the officials had not even seen fit to include any ex-servicemen in the preparations. As a result the Discharged Soldiers and Sailors' Federation and the Comrades of the Great War Association withdrew from the activities. They had planned alternative celebrations, but the Mayor and his Council refused them the use of Wardown Park.

On July 19, a rainy Saturday afternoon, a somewhat gloomy official procession set off from Park Street recreation ground, along a route which passed the Federation's headquarters, at the corner of Lea Road, where the ex-servicemen had prepared their own contribution to the

'celebrations'. The Federation lined both sides of the procession route with maimed and disabled ex-servicemen. Across the road they hung a streamer saying: 'Don't pity us, give us work'. As the official procession went past, it was joined by the angry ex-servicemen.

Eventually they arrived outside the Town Hall where they halted in heavy rain whilst the Mayor read out the proclamation of peace. By now the Mayor was the most unpopular man in town and his rating declined even further as thousands of old soldiers booed and catcalled his patronising speech. Sensing the increasing

hostility one councillor called for three cheers for ex-servicemen. This only gave rise to even greater howls of derision. By now the noise was deafening. Suddenly the crowd surged forwards, causing the Mayor and his entourage to beat an undignified retreat into the Town Hall. The crowd swiftly swept aside two constables.

Willing hands tore down the doors and the people entered just in time to see some of the mayoral party disappearing through a rear entrance. Once inside, untold damage was done.

Decorations for the Grand Ball were torn down. The contents of the Town Hall were hurled through the windows into the street.

Meanwhile someone discovered that the Mayor and some supporters were barricaded inside the Mayor's parlour. Serious harm to them was only prevented by the last minute arrival of a contingent of police. The crowd inside the Town Hall engaged them in pitched battle, the fighting soon spreading to those outside. Missiles were hurled at the Town Clerk's office.

Later that evening a crowd of 20,000 gathered in Popes Meadows for the advertised fireworks display. But the rioting and looting at the Town Hall, which had taken on a carnival atmosphere, turned out to be a more powerful attraction. At 10 pm the Mayor was still besieged in his parlour. Instead of the planned banquet the mayoral party had spent seven hours huddled together in the dark behind shattered windows.

As the night wore on the riot gathered momentum. The Food Office in Manchester Street was raided and several fires started. Attempts to put out the flames were met with resistance and the Fire Brigade beat a hasty retreat. More bonfires were lit outside and inside the Town Hall.

In the confusion the Mayor was smuggled out, disguised as a special constable. The nearby garage of Hart's Motors was raided for petrol. When this was added to the fire the Town Hall quickly became d blazing inferno. Attempts to put out the fire were thwarted by the cutting of hosepipes. Remaining hoses had to be used to protect the police from the crowd rather than to quench the flames.

During the fierce fighting that followed the police found themselves heavily outnumbered as soldiers, many in uniform, joined in against them. A chemist's shop was raided and medicine bottles were used as missiles. A man was hit so

hard by a fireman's jet that he was hurled through a music shop window. The crowd that went in to rescue him emerged with three pianos. These were dragged into the roadway and used as accompaniments. The crowd sang

'Keep the Home Fires Burning' before the biggest bonfire that Luton had ever seen. The

burning down of the Town Hall provided the perfect culmination to what had started as a very wet day.

Around midnight, supported by reinforcements from London, the police read the riot act to the crowd, which by now numbered several thousands. Then, just as the Town Hall clock struck one (before crashing to the ground amid a pile of debris) the police began a savage assault, hitting out at men, women and children.

The following morning Luton looked like one of the ravaged cities of World War I. Steel-helmeted troops stood guard amidst the burnt-out embers of buildings and looted shops. The day passed with no signs of hostility between the troops and the locals. But after closing time further outbreaks of rioting and looting began. This continued for three or four nights until either police reinforcements (or lack of further places to loot) brought the business to an end.

Needless to say no more official banquets were planned in Luton for some time. A subdued Council organised a banquet to end all banquets - for the aged and children from the local workhouse.

What became of the Mayor? Fearful of his life he cut short his political career and left for Sutton-on-Sea. He only returned to Luton twice. Once for the funeral of a friend and once more for his own.

The 'restoration of law and order' led to several arrests. Because the authorities were fearful of further repercussions the judge handed out surprisingly light sentences. He even said there had been 'some provocation'.

(This account was drawn from 'The Luton Riots : A Reconstruction of the Events', a recording made by Mr Ron Hall, reproduced by Bedfordshire County Library from a copy in the possession of Dr D.H. Shaw.)

CONCLUSIONS

There is little doubt that during the years 1918-1920 Britain was near to a social revolution, much nearer in fact than in the well publicised days of 1926. The collapse of the General Strike ended the era during which the ruling classes trembled. The mutinies we have described cannot be separated from the revolutionary events that were sweeping across the industrialised world. There is no doubt that they represent a significant chapter in working class history.

The evidence presented shows that for a while the power of the armed forces had slipped out of the control of the ruling classes. This raises fundamental questions concerning the role of the 'working class leaders' of this period. Apart from their resignation from the National Industrial Conference (in full glare and publicity) the TUC leaders were very careful to avoid any course of action that could have led to a common front between workers and members of the armed forces. Leaders of the Triple Alliance were aware of the mood of the country and of the state of the armed forces. Smillies' account of Lloyd George's remarks to the leaders of the Triple Alliance is very revealing: 'The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon.

Trouble has already occurred in a number of camps. If you ... strike, then you will defeat us'.

(68)

The trade union leaders were conscious of their role in this critical period. This was clearly shown by T. E. Naylor, leader of the London Society of Compositors and later a Labour MP.

In 1922 he pleaded for the government to help the unemployed, reminding them that in 1919

it was the 'responsible' trade unionists who had prevented 'the revolution which would undoubtedly have broken out'.

The trade union leaders never had any intention to defeat the government or the employers.

The major task of the organisers of labour was the same then as it is today: to deliver a docile labour force, pacified by insignificant pay increases, and to replace struggle centred on genuine grievances with rhetoric about nationalisation and other red herrings. To grasp this point is to understand why the Labour leaders of 1919 did not take advantage of the support which radical policies could have had from the army.

The possibility of successful revolution in Britain is only one of the many questions raised by our account of the collapse of the British Army. Another question is : 'to what extent did mutinies in both the Army and the Navy limit the war of intervention against Russia?' A critique of the Russian Revolution lies beyond the scope of this work. (69) Certain questions, however, have at least to be asked. 'Just how serious was the threat to the Russian Revolution from the hostile capitalist world?'. America was only marginally Involved. Britain, as we have seen, was In no position to maintain any substantial force in Russia. Neither were France or Germany. If the threat from the capitalist world was relatively minor, how much credence can we give to the Leninist excuses for repression, usually 'justified' by the existence of hostile foreign forces, poised to intervene against the revolution? Or was it that the repressive policies had their origins in the theory and practice of Bolshevism, as initiated by Lenin and Trotsky? (70)

If the Russian Revolution was 'allowed' to happen by virtue of the fact that soldiers in the West were unwilling to suppress it - often for no stronger motive than a sensible wish to go home - then questions are raised concerning the real location of the Russian Revolution. For instance, were the victories of the Red Army determined on the Russian battlefields or In the dockyards of Southampton, Hamburg and Marseilles? How significant were the demands for instant demobilisation by the Western Soldiers' and Sailors' Councils in determining the initial victories of the Russian Revolution?

Conversely to what extent was the containment of the European revolutionary movements by the Social Democratic parties and by the trade unions the result of the same social force responsible for the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution? Revolutions are not isolated events. They reflect social pressures capable of transcending continents. So do mutinies - which are essential ingredients of revolutionary change. For these reasons it is nonsense to speak of the first working class revolution having taken place in Russia.

Conversely, when we speak of the bureaucratisation of the Russian Revolution it is even more nonsensical to speak as if this were simply due to the special circumstances of Russia.

The foregoing account is not intended to provide a list of martyrs for this or that cause. For us libertarians it matters little whether. In the long run, the mutinies we have described benefited Russia, Dublin, Germany or what. There is a limit to the consequences of an action beyond which the attribution of causality becomes philosophical speculation. It would be a falsification of history to say that most of these men had any clear picture of the society to which their efforts were geared. No! What is significant in these mutinies is the way men

come together, in adverse and dangerous circumstances, in a spirit of solidarity and self-sacrifice that has seldom been equalled. This is of real significance to libertarians, seeking the spirit of freedom in history's darkest hours.

None of the struggles here described were inspired or directed by any vanguard party. At the same time it is clear that there was a widespread sense of sympathy with the Russian Revolution, bound up with the belief (however expressed) that fundamental change could only be brought about by collective working class action.

Moreover, while there was no directing Central Committee or Revolutionary General Staff (soldiers had had enough of these, already) conflicts in the armed forces were not limited to sporadic, isolated outbursts. What comes across loud and clear is that in spite of a legal situation in which it did not pay to advertise them, the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Councils forged many links both within the armed forces and with workers in struggle. What happened in the armed forces was simply part of a broad social movement, the full extent of which has yet to be adequately assessed. This movement contained elements from the various socialist groups. But they did not dominate it. While they were part of this historic process few of the groups were really aware of the full extent and consequences of the threat to authority in which they were involved.

Many have seen (and still see) the relative absence of centralised and permanent structures in the struggles here described as signifying a lack of revolutionary consciousness amongst the people involved. In this the traditional left has totally misread the situation. They fail to recognise the libertarian, revolutionary face of the movement, seeing only its bureaucratic, institutionalised posterior. They in

fact

contribute to its dimensions, spending most of their time seeking to build various

'revolutionary vanguard' parties. For us, this page is turned. We can now begin to assess the mass autonomous movements of this century as an expression of the fundamental drive by ordinary men and women to dominate their own lives, to influence events, and to alter the course of history by themselves and for themselves.

Notes

1. Quoted from K. Rosenkranz's Life of Hegel (Berlin, 1844), p.352

2. K.Marx, The First Indian War of Independence 1855-59 (Moscow, 1960), p. 42

3. F.P.Crozier, A Brass Hat in No Man's Land (London, 1950), p. 42

4. Ibid., p. 42

5. The practice of employing officers as 'battle police' played a considerable role. from the Battle of the Somme onwards. Crozier describes an incident in July 1916 which typified official fear that battle fatigue was a threat to the authority structure of the army;

'I hear a rumour about riflemen retiring on the left and go out to "stop the rot". A strong rabble of tired, hungry and thirsty stragglers approach me from the east ... They are marched to the water reserve, given a drink, and hunted back to fight. Another more formidable party

cuts across to the south. They mean business. They are damned if they are going to stay, it's all up. A young sprinting subaltern heads them off. They push by him. He draws his revolver and threatens them. They take no notice. He fires. Down drops a British soldier, at his feet.

The effect is instantaneous. They turn back.'(Ibid. , p. 109) 6. Return of Proceedings supplied to the Judge Advocate General for August 4 to March 31, 1920

7. T.H. Wintringham. Mutiny (London, Stanley Nott, 1936), p.311

8. According to Pankhurst's The Workers' Dreadnought the figures were much higher. The Dreadnought's figures were based on those compiled by a serving soldier, H.V. Clark, from the records of Army Routine Orders and similar documents at British Headquarters at Lille.

They were : 1914 : 528; 1915 : 10,488; 1916 : 12,689; 1917 : 13,165; 1918 :

1,035. If correct, these figures reflect an inverse relationship between the number of mutinies, which increased towards the end of the war, and the number of convictions which declined towards the end of the war. A visit from the police, however, produced a retraction from the Dreadnought which stated that 3,076 had been sentenced to death but only 343 were executed. (Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969, p. 382)

9. A. Boyle, Trenchard (London, Collins, 1962), p. 228

10. See D. Gill and G. Dallas 'Mutiny at Etaples' in Past and Present No. 69 (November 1975). Of the spate of mutinies at the Etaples base from September 1917 to 1919, the authors say: 'These disturbances, though arising for a variety of reasons and rarely linking with each other, went far towards compelling reform, concessions and measures of improvement.

They.led eventually to the dismantling of large sections of the army.' (p. 88) The original research, published by these authors is perhaps the only significant contribution to the study of soldiers' struggles during the 1914-18 war to appear for about 40 years. It is symptomatic of the general lack of interest in this area that this article is part of a whole book on the subject which has never been published because of lack of interest by academic and publishing establishments, of whatever political hue.

11. Gill and Dallas, op. cit., p.92

12. Quoted by Gill and Dallas, ibid. , p. 92

13. See Gill and Dallas, op. cit. , who draw attention to an affinity between the undisciplined Anzacs and the fiercely disciplined Scottish troops. The initial rioting on Sunday was sparked off by Anzac troops, contemptuous of the narrow discipline of the British Army and its social distinctions between officers and men.

14. According to Gill and Dallas the HAC detachment was composed mainly of officers and

'was the one unit on which complete reliance could be placed. Drawn from every section of society save from the working classes, the cadets were certain to stand firm. ' (op. cit. , p.

105)

15. Gill and Dallas, ibid., p. 102

16. Ibid., p. 102

17. Ibid. , p. 103. By 1918 there were some 200,000 men in the Chinese Labour Corps alone.

They worked on building, road-making, even in factories. There was substantial syndicalist influence amongst them and they formed several unions. Between 1916 and 1918 they were involved in at least 25 strikes. Since the men were under military discipline these strikes in themselves constituted mutiny.

After the war, Labour Corps returnees had a profound effect in China itself. In Shanghai there was a syndicalist group called the Chinese Wartime Labourers Corps. In Canton, returnees created 26 new unions regarded as the 'first modern unions in China'. (See Nohara Shiro,

'Anarchism and the May 4th Movement', Libero International No. 3, November 1975). An interesting example of how ideas cross frontiers.

18. Quoted from a letter. Gill and Dallas, op. cit., p. 106

19. Ibid. , p. Ill

20. Ibid., p. Ill

21. Ibid., p. 112

22. To avoid confusion it must be stressed that my use of the term 'autonomous' refers to human activity which is to a greater or lesser degree organised and purposive, but not externally directed by a political party or institution.

23. Wintringham, op. cit., p.310

24. Quoted by Wintringham, ibid. , p. 311

25. Ibid., pp. 312-3

26. Daily Herald, January 11, 1919

27. Daily Herald, ibid.

28. Horatio Bottomley (1860-1933) was the founder and editor of the magazine John Bull, and an Independent MP from 1918 to 1922. He was convicted of fraudulent conversion in 1922 and died a pauper. A demagogue, he pocketed a fortune out of war-time recruitment meetings, where it was said that the size of his peroration was determined by the size of his

'take'. He 'took' £79.000.

29. Diaries of Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson. Vol.1. (London, Cassell, 1927)
30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. See The Great War, ed. H.W. Wilson (London, Amalgamated Press, 1919), Vol.13, p.322

36. Ibid., p. 311

37. Quoted in the Daily Herald, May 27, 1919

38. A. Boyle, op. cit., p.320

39. Details of the Calais mutiny have been recorded by Wintringham (op. cit.) and Gill and Dallas (op. cit.). There is an interesting account by a participant in A. Killick, Mutiny: The Story of the Calais Mutiny (Brighton, 1968)

40. Wintringham, op. cit., p.316

41. Gill and Dallas, op. cit., p. 108

42. B.G.A. Cannell, quoted by Wintringham (op. cit., p. 325). Cannell's account of the mutiny is in From Monk to Busman (London, Skeffington, 1935). The book contains a foreword by the Bishop of London.

43. Wintringham, op. cit., p. 108

44. Gill and Dallas, op. cit. , p. 108

45. According to Gill and Dallas : 'There was a sad sequel to this story: Private John Pantling, whose arrest served as a spark to ignite, the mutiny, died on February 13, 1919, aged 32, of pneumonia as a result of exposure whilst under arrest. Apparently he had been placed in a damp cell, handcuffed with leg irons to prevent any movement, and inadequately fed. A collection amongst his comrades raised several hundred pounds, half of which was designated for his son's education. Little is known of this remarkable man, who played so large a part in organising the service troops at Calais Base, and whose last days were spent in negotiations with a team of senior officers sent down from GHQ.' (op. cit. , p. Ill) 46. Winston Churchill, The World Crisis series: The Aftermath (London, Thornton and Butterworth, 1929)

47. Ibid., p. 60

48. The mere asking of this question was at variance with the Government's policy, declared in the House of Commons, where it had been emphatically asserted on numerous occasions, that only volunteers were being sent to Russia.

49. There have been many accounts of the mutinies in the German forces. For an interesting account from a libertarian standpoint see The Wilhelmshaven Revolt by Icarus. First published in 1944 (by Freedom Press) it has recently (197.5) been republished by Simian (c/o

Box AA, 1 Exchange, Honley nr Huddersfield, Yorks.) 50. Lionel Yexley, euphemistically referred to as a 'naval correspondent' (see Kendall, op. cit.

, p. 191) was the editor of a lower deck journal called The Fleet. Yexley had amassed a lot of information about underground naval organisations and his statement that such organisations had existed for ten years was confirmed in Bradley's Naval Annual of 1919. These incidents are also referred to by Geoffrey Bennett in Cowan's War (London, Collins, 1964), p. 198. See also Kendall, op. cit. , p. 190

51. Hansard, March 12, 1919

52. Bennett, op. cit., p. 198

53. Ibid., p. 199

53a. On December 29, 1919, following a series of acts of militancy, a review of the sentences of those convicted of naval mutiny was announced by the First Lord of the Admiralty.

Sentences of up to two years were halved. So were one year sentences. The men serving such sentences had their medals restored. Even the two sailors caught trying to sabot the fan engines of the 'Vindictive' had their convictions reviewed after two years.

54.. Bermett, op. cit. , p.203

55. For an account of this mutiny, see Archangel 1918-1919 by Edmund Ironside (London, Constable, 1953), p. 113

56. Kendall, op. cit., pp. 191-2

57. Wintringham, op. cit., p. 328

58. J.G. Eayrs, In Defence of Canada. Vol.1 (Toronto Univ. Press, 1964), p.43

58a. The facts concerning the twelve civilians arrested are obscure. It is even possible that these charges were dropped. What is significant is the fact that many close links had been forged between Canadians and locals, who held the former in high esteem.

59. The Times, March 8, 1919

60. Ibid. , March 26, 1919

61. Ibid., March 10, 1919

62. In January 1968 the Liverpool Daily Post contained an article in which a returned Canadian soldier suggested that Hickman was in the hut when he was shot.

63. The Daily Herald, June 6, 1919

64. Ibid. , June 21. 1919

65. See Conflict in Hampshire by Donald Featherstone (Southampton, Paul Care, 1976), esp.

p. 65. Similar incidents occurred during World War II. On July 4, 1945 between four and five hundred Canadians stationed at Aldershot rioted and smashed an amusement arcade and several shop windows, causing £25,000 worth of damage. They were eventually quelled by a force of MP's from Portsmouth, Reading, Oxford and Southampton.

66. Kendall, op. cit.. p. 190

67. Cabinet Paper 24/96 of January 1, 1920. Also cited by Kendall, op. cit., p. 190

68. Quoted by Aneurin Bevan in In Place of Fear (London. Heinemann. 1952), p.20